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## UNIT 1 SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: MEANINGS, SIGNIFICANCE AND COMPONENTS

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### Structure

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Definition of Social Movements
- 1.3 Social Movements and Political Movements
- 1.4 Extra-Constitutional or non-institutional Path
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- 1.6 Components of Social Movements
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### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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Social movements are universal found in all societies in the past and present. Their nature, scope and frequency vary. In the early period of political formations social movements shaped the state – its functions, responsibilities as well as accountability and also its political boundary. They also played an important role in distribution of power among various segments in society. In modern times they have played a very important role in challenging the Church and feudal authority, foreign rules and authoritarian regimes. French and Russian revolutions, Indian freedom movement, various peasant movements have profound impact on our life. The fascist movement in Germany, Islamic movement in Middle east, Hindutva movement in India or Tamilian movement in Sri Lanka have not only influenced political system but also value system of the people. Their legacies influence us all in a variety of ways. In the contemporary times their occurrences are in all the states. They often though not always play decisive role in all political systems – democratic and authoritarian. They make and unmake political institutions, norms of social and political behaviour and also nature of regimes. Social and political conflicts as well as expectations of the people get reflected in movements.

Understanding of social movements is important not only for all those who are dissatisfied with the present social and political order but also to those who are contented with the system to understand fragility of the political institutions and their future. Any socially sensitive person, no matter one is activist or academic, one is sympathetic or critic of the political system cannot ignore social movements of the time. Our understanding of nature of political institutions and their working, nature of Constitution, political decisions and legislation remain incomplete without understanding social movements. We will have a better understanding of the Directive Principles and Fundamental Rights of the Indian Constitutions, if we carefully analyse political processes which affected Indian freedom movement in the 1930s and 1940s. Similarly various land reform legislations of the 1950s have antecedents in peasant movements in different parts of the country. In short our understanding of political institutions and processes remain incomplete without the understanding of social movements. The study of social movements offers “a way to blend humanistic and social scientific concerns. The humanist’s concern with historical understanding and values and the social scientist’s concern with using general

principles to systematically order empirical data can be joined.” Factual knowledge of these events is required if we are to know how to interpret, order and compare them.

In this unit objective is to understand the definition of social movements, their comparison with political movements, as well as the importance and components of social movements.

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## 1.2 DEFINITION OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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In common parlance, media and political circles the term ‘social movement’ is often used loosely conveying different meanings. Sometimes it is used to show a historical trend like modernisation or urbanisation. The term is also used to indicate a set of activities undertaken by one or many organisations to bring ‘change’ in society such as education movement launched by the government department of education for starting schools and enrolling students. It is also used for collective action of a segment of society. The phrase social movement is in vogue among political leaders and social activists to camouflage their political activities.

However, the term ‘social movement’ gained currency in European languages in the early nineteenth century. This was the period of social upheaval. Church and authority the absolute power of the monarchs were challenged. People were demanding democratic rights and asserting for freedom and equality. The political leaders and authors who used the term ‘social movement’ were concerned with the emancipation of the exploited classes and the creation of a new society by changing property relationships. Their ideological orientation is reflected in their definition. Hence there is no one definition of ‘social movement.’ Scholars and social activists have different ideological positions on political system and expected social change. And even those who share the same meaning of social change often differ in their views on strategy and path to bring change. But one thing is certain among all conceptualisation of social movement i.e. collective action. It is about the mobilisation of the people for political action. However, collective action as such is not synonymous of social movement. Action of a mob in streets is though a collective behaviour, it cannot be called a social movement. For instance when a mob at the railway station stops a train for misbehaviour of railway staff or prefer to travel without ticket can not be called social movement. Nor riots between two ethnic groups or act of looting food grains from shops or destruction of public property can be called so. These acts by themselves are not social movements. They may be a part – one of the programmes of the social movement.

We do not call these collective behaviour as social movements because they are often impulsive and do not aim at bringing social change. They are reaction to a particular situation. However, when they are engineered as a programme of the larger agenda for social change — challenging or even perpetuating power of a particular group for status quo — then rioting may become a part of the social movement. For instance those who desire to establish dominance of a community engineer riots to create insecurity and thereby ‘community consciousness’ against other community. In such a case riot is not an impulsive isolated phenomenon. Or in several cases social movements emerge from riots as they breed political activities to sustain emotion of the people. Collective action for bringing ‘social change’ is an important dimension of definition of social movements. Of course the collective action for maintaining or not disturbing social change as perceived by others is also social movement. Such collective action for status quo may be called

counter-movement. Moreover, there is no one meaning of social change. This is evident from the following sample definitions of social movements used in social science literature.

- Paul Wilkinson defines social movement as “ a deliberate collective endeavour to promote change in *any direction* and by any means, not excluding violence, illegality, revolution or withdrawal into ‘utopian’ community. Social movements are thus clearly different from historical movements, tendencies or trends. It is important to note, however, that such tendencies and trends, and the influence of the unconscious or irrational factors in human behaviour, may be of crucial importance in illuminating the problems of interpreting and explaining social movement”.
- According to Herbert Blumer. “Social movements can be viewed as collective enterprises to establish a new order of life. They have their inception in the condition of unrest, and derive their motive power on one hand from dissatisfaction with the current form of life, and on the other hand, from wishes and hopes for a new scheme or system of living.”
- For Doug McAdam, social movements are “those organized efforts, on the part of excluded groups, to promote or resist changes in the structure of society that involve recourse to noninstitutional forms of political participation.”
- Social movements are, according to Sidney Tarrow , “ collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities”.

Note three important elements of the above definition. They are (1) collective action; (2) social change and (3) common purpose.

Strictly speaking, therefore, agitation or protests are not social movements. Because, they more often than not, do not aim at bringing social change. They do not conceive that. They are reaction to a particular situation. But at the same time, more often than not, a social movement develops in course of time, and it begins with protest or agitation which may not have conceived the notion of political change. For instance, when students of the engineering college in Gujarat protested against the Mess bill, it was a relatively spontaneous act. But that protest led to the Nav Nirman Andolan of 1974 in Gujarat. Moreover, a particular collective action may be only an agitation for some scholars, and a movement for others, depending upon the level of analysis and the perspective. For example, the collective action of a section of society demanding the formation of linguistic states in the ‘fifties was viewed as an ‘agitation’ by some and as a ‘movement’ by others. Similarly, though riots are not social movements, they are more often than not part of ongoing movements.

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### 1.3 SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND POLITICAL MOVEMENTS

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More often than not, ‘social’ and ‘political’ movements are treated more or less the same — except those collective efforts which are mainly and so far confined to personal salvation in relation to supernatural power and do not relate to social structure and within as well as inter-community relationship. But the same movement when it enters in the arena of social relationship affecting public domain it gets character of political movement. For instance community’s collective struggle for sanskritisation is though

social movement, it also challenges existing power relationship as community asserts not only higher status but also compete with those who dominate. Backward caste movement is a case in point. Rudolf Heberle (1951) argues that all movements have political implications even if their members do not strive for political power. However, some scholars like Andre Gunder Frank and Marta Fuentes (1987) make a distinction between social and political movements. According to them, the former does not strive for state power. Social movements 'seek more autonomy rather than state power'. There is a difference between social and political power, and the latter is located in the state alone. According to these authors, the objective of social movement is social transformation. The participants get mobilised for attaining social justice. This thesis is problematic. Of course, society and state, and therefore social and political powers are not one and the same. But to differentiate between social power and political power in the contemporary world is to gloss over reality, and ignore the complexities of political processes. Politics is not located only in the political parties. The movements involving issues concerning the sense of justice or injustice have political implications. Social movement involves any collective struggle aiming at bringing social transformation questioning prevailing hegemony and dominance, property relations, power relations, assertion for identity against the perceived adversaries and resisting dominance; struggle for justice, involves capturing or influencing political authority, though it may not be on the immediate agenda. Therefore, in the present context, the difference between 'social' and 'political' movement is merely semantic.

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## 1.4 EXTRA-CONSTITUTIONAL OR NON-INSTITUTIONAL PATH

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Social movements follow 'institutional' as well as non-institutional path. The former may be called constitutional and the latter is considered as extra-constitutional or illegal path. Extra-constitutional path is also called 'direct action' against the state or government. The action which is legally permitted and 'widely accepted as binding in society or part of society' (Johnson 1966) at a given point of time is institutionalised action. Such actions include petitioning, voting in elections, and fighting legal battles in courts of law. They themselves are not called as social movements as they are part of institutional mechanism and functioning. But when these methods are accompanied by other collective actions and are used as tactics they become a part of the movements. According to Rajni Kothari, 'direct action can be defined as an extra constitutional political technique that takes the form of a group action, is aimed at some political change directed against the government in power' (1960).

A line between legal and illegal or constitutional and extra-constitutional is very thin and ticklish. It is a matter of interpretation of law and constitution. Those who are in authority or support the status quo can interpret a particular action as illegal; but those who strive for social change may interpret the same action as legal. For many, violent means is illegal therefore not permitted. The term 'extra-constitutional' can be a matter of interpretation. Non-institutionalised collective action takes several forms, such as, protest, agitation, strike, *satyagraha*, *gherao*, *riot*, etc.

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## 1.5 IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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Many political philosophers and leaders conceive the ideal political system and social order. They plead for a necessity and sometimes inevitability of social movements

including a revolutionary movement to oppose the 'present' political regime and the system and to establish the system which they consider 'ideal' and perfect capable to resolve the problems of society. So once the 'new' or ideal social order is established social movements have no place to exist. What at the most requires is changes in institutional mechanism to resolve conflict that may arise. They find social movements not only redundant but also detrimental in the ideal social order. Often such movements are looked upon either as 'counter revolutionary' and reactionary and/or impulsive, and naïve and/or irresponsible. In this view dissent is not appreciated and even not tolerated. This is what happened in soviet Russia after the October Revolution in 1917. During the 1950s and 1960s not only several leaders of the ruling party but also political scientists in India looked down strikes, demonstrations and mass movements as disruptive and therefore 'illegal'. One of them argued: 'One can understand if not justify the reasons which led the people in a dependent country to attack and destroy everything which was a symbol or an expression of foreign rule. But it is very strange that people should even now behave as if they continue to live in a dependent country ruled by foreigners.'

The assumption that the ideal political system is ipso facto capable of resolving all conflict in society is simplistic. Such view is dangerous for democratic social order. There is not, and cannot be an end of history; the final destination and fool proof system. This is not a static concept of political system and society. Each society has its own contradictions. The system may resolve some issues but also can generate new areas of conflict among different segments of society. The leaders and the members of their class or social group leading the movements are likely to occupy seat of power and reap benefits. That situation generates conflict between the beneficiaries and the deprived.

Moreover, those who dominate and occupy seat of power tend to claim to have ultimate and all wisdom for the 'good of society'. There is a tendency among the political leaders not to step down from power. Sometimes they feel that without them others would harm society. Such a tendency leads to intolerance towards dissent and opposition. Dissent is a spirit of democracy. And social movement is one form of organised dissent.

Social movements provides a possibility for articulation of grievances and problems. They bring pressure on the state, keep check over the authority needed for healthy democracy. Social movement is way of people's/segment's collective politics to express their aspirations and priorities. Without understanding politics of the people we cannot understand complexities and dynamics of political system.

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## **1.6 COMPONENTS OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

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Social movements have five main components: Objectives, ideology, programmes, leadership, and organisation. They are interdependent, influencing each other. As discussed above emotional outcry of group of people in the form of crowd is not social movement. Social movement is related to social and political change. So it has an immediate and long term objective. The immediate objective may be to resolve a particular issue or protest against the decision of the authority. But that collective action does not end there. It takes up other issues and proceed to a long term objective of changing authority, power relationship, dominance and political system. For the long term objective the movement evolves strategy for action. It gives priorities to certain programmes over

others, and also focuses on a particular direction, mobilises certain groups. The path of action is closely related to or get evolved with the notion of the desired social change. It involves a set of ideas, propositions and values that enable to perceive in particular manner social reality. The set of ideas and ideals form ideology. The ideology is not necessarily well-knit, nor always preconceived. In some cases ideology directs the movement and in other cases ideology gets evolved and directs the movement. Leadership plays important role in articulation of ideology and evolving strategies for action.

Social movement involves mobilisation of people who in course of the process identify with the objective of the movement. They share values and begin to share perception of common understanding of social reality. For their mobilisation and to sustain their participation, the leader(s) evolve different programmes. This also requires some kind of organisation. The organisation may be loose or well formed with centralised or decentralised decision-making system for launching programmes.

Neither of these components are a priori and static. They evolve. Their nature and function vary from movement to movement. In some movements they are found in rudimentary form whereas in others they are fairly well developed. These components — leadership, organisation and also ideology do get changed in the course of the movement. In some cases, even the objectives change and move in different direction than the earlier ones.

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## **1.7 SUMMARY**

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The term social movement evolved and began to be used during the early nineteenth century. It was a period of social unrest. There is no precise definition of social movement. But all scholars who have studied social movements do emphasise collective action and mobilisation of the people. Social movements strive for social change. Objectives, ideology, leadership, programmes and organisation are the major components of social movements. They are the spirit of democracy and dynamics of society.

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## **1.8 EXERCISES**

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- 1) What is the importance of a study of social movements in understanding politics?
- 2) Explain difference between riot and social movement.
- 3) What are the common elements of different definitions of social movement?
- 4) Which are the main components of social movements?
- 5) What is the difference between ‘social’ and ‘political’ movements?
- 6) Explain the term ‘direct action’.



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## **UNIT 2 APPROACHES TO STUDY SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: LIBERAL, GANDHIAN AND MARXIAN**

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### **Structure**

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The Marxist Approach
- 2.3 Structure – Function Approach
- 2.4 Gandhian Approach
- 2.5 Resource Mobilisation Theory
- 2.6 Relative Deprivation Theory
- 2.7 Summary
- 2.8 Exercises

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### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

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Facts do not speak for themselves. They have to be collected, arranged, categorised and interpreted. One collects particular kind of ‘facts’ and another observer collects different kinds of ‘facts’ of the same event. Both give different meanings and arrive at different conclusions of the same event. There is no one way of looking social facts and processes. The same movements can be constructed and interpreted in many different ways, depending upon theoretical perspective from which one looks at the phenomena. Theoretical perspective or approach guides the selection of facts, their arrangement, classification and interpretation. One gets better understanding of the process with more systematic and rigorous perspective than casual and unsystematic way of looking the phenomena. There are different approaches to study social movements. But at the same time we should remember that empirical processes are not neat to fit into any one approach. Social and political processes are complex and have their own logic. Moreover, no approach is in pure form. There are variations among the followers of the same theoretical perspective. There are different perspectives among the Marxists and also among the liberals. What is provided here is a broad framework, as guide of a particular approach.

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### **2.2 MARXIST APPROACH**

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Scholars following the Marxist approach to analyse various social movements and those who are involved in social movements claiming to be Marxist are primarily interested in bringing about revolutionary change in society. According to the Marxist approach conflict is the central core of social movements. There are different kinds of conflicts in society. Some conflicts are between individuals for personal power, style of functioning, between the communities—social, ethnic, religious, regional etc.— and other conflicts are around material interest and domination of one over the others. The nature of the non-class conflict varies from society to society and can be resolved through negotiations and institutional mechanism. Sometimes though not always such conflict is in a garb of ‘class’/economic conflict. That is, economic conflict of different classes belonging to

separate communities take the form of ethnic conflict. Class conflict is located in economic structure of society, in-built in the production and distribution system. It is around domination and subjugation between the classes. Those who own means of production dominate social and political system. In all forms of class society specific form of production predominates, which influences other forms of social relations. Ralph Miliband observes, " Class domination can never be purely 'economic', or purely 'cultural': it must always have a strong and pervasive 'political' content, not least because the law is crystallized form which politics assumes in providing the necessary sanction and legitimization of all forms of domination. In this sense, 'politics' sanctions what is 'permitted', and therefore 'permits' the relations between the members of different and conflicting classes, inside and outside their 'relation of production'."

Those who own and control the means of production take away the surplus from those who produce. They accumulate surplus for their end and expand and perpetuate their control over the society. The former may be feudal lord in feudal system or industrial bourgeois in capitalist system. Antagonistic interests between the propertied and labour classes are inherent in a class-based society that generates contradictions. The former use the coercive as well as persuasive power of the state, and also other institutions, including religion, culture, education, mass media etc, to perpetuate their hegemony in society and to control the exploited classes. The latter resist, protest and occasionally revolt or launch organised and collective action against the dominance of the propertied classes. It is their effort to bring about revolutionary political change by overthrowing the dominant classes in power. In short, class struggle is the central driving force for resistance. Such collective actions take the form of social movements.

Though to Marxists, structural causes of conflicting economic interests are central, number of Marxist scholars have begun to pay attention to ethnic, religious and other cultural factors. Some of them have begun to analyse the nature of the consciousness of exploited classes. According to Marxist scholars, members of the same class not only have common interests vis-a-vis other classes, but also share a common consciousness regarding their position in society that they share common interests. This facilitates their collective action against the ruling classes and state.

They assert that the parliamentary democracy in capitalist state protects the interests of the haves and facilitates exploitation of the labour. Hence the conflict between the haves and have-nots cannot be resolved through institutional mechanism. A.R. Desai argued in the 1960s that civil and democratic rights of the underprivileged were increasingly violated in capitalist system. The state failed to provide basic human rights of the vast majority of the exploited classes. The have-nots in rural areas were deprived of their livelihood natural resources of land, forest and water. People resist against anti-people measures of the state and dominant classes. Through various organised and unorganised struggles the poor demand for the protection of their basic rights. He asserted, "The parliamentary form of government, as a political institutional device, has proved to be inadequate to continue or expand concrete democratic rights of the people. This form, either operates as a shell within which the authority of capital perpetuates itself, obstructing or reducing the opportunities for people to consciously participate in the process of society, or is increasingly transforming itself into a dictatorship, where capital sheds some of its democratic pretensions and rules by open, ruthless dictatorial means. Public protests will continue till people have ended the rule of capital in those countries where



it still persists. They will also continue against those bureaucratic totalitarian political regimes where the rule of capital has ended, but where due to certain peculiar historical circumstances Stalinist bureaucratic, terrorist political regimes have emerged. The movements and protests of people will continue till adequate political institutional forms for the realisation and exercise of concrete democratic rights are found (1965).”

For Marxists, social movements are just not a protest and expression of the grievances. The exploited classes are not interested in reforming this or that institutions though they do fight for incremental rights to strengthen their strength. For instance working class fights for more wages, regulation of work, social security and also participation in management. Through this they build up solidarity among the workers and expand their struggles. Ultimately their attempt is to crack the dominant political system so that in the process the struggles move in the direction of revolutionary changes in the ownership of means of production and over through the dominant state structure. The struggles of the oppressed are both violent and non-violent depending upon the strength and means adopted by the state and propertied classes for the oppression. They are not averse to violent path but it does not mean that they always follow the violent means. For them the means is not that important as the ends. They often highlight the violence and oppression of the state and the dominant classes against the exploited classes. In such a situation the latter are left with no choice to counter the adversaries with the same method.

There is a good deal of debate among Marxist scholars on theoretical and methodological issues. Recently a group of Marxist historians, the ‘Subaltern Studies’ group, has begun to study ‘history from below’. They criticise the ‘traditional’ Marxist historians for ignoring the history of the masses, as if the ‘subaltern’ classes do not make history of their own, depending solely on the advanced classes or the elite for organisation and guidance. It is argued that the traditional Marxist scholars have undermined cultural factors and viewed a linear development of class consciousness (Guha 1983). On the other hand, the Subaltern Studies historians are strongly criticised by other Marxist scholars for ignoring structural factors and viewing ‘consciousness’ as independent of structural contradictions. They are accused of being Hegelian ‘idealists’.

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## **2.3 STRUCTURE — FUNCTION APPROACH**

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There is a great deal of variation amongst the non-Marxist scholars, in their approach to the analysis of social movements. The ideological positions regarding a need for social and/or political change, and the role of movements therein differ. It is argued by several liberal scholars such as William Kornhauser, Robert Nisbet, Edward Shils and others that mass movements are the product of mass societies which are extremist and anti-democratic. These scholars are in favour of excluding the masses from day-to-day participation in politics, which hampers the efficient functioning of the government. Some Indian scholars who approved of the agitation for independence from foreign rule, did not favour agitation by people in the post-independence period. They condemned them outright as ‘dangerous’ and ‘dysfunctional’ for ‘civilised society’. Though some other liberals do not favour revolutionary change in the political and economic structure, they advocate ‘political change’ which is confined to change in government and political institutions. A few are for ‘revolutionary’ change but they differ from Marxist scholars in class analysis. They lay emphasis on political institutions and culture. In their analysis

of the movements, some do not inquire into social and economic causes of conflict and collective struggles. Others differ in their emphasis on the causes responsible for the movements. Some emphasise individual psychological traits, some focus on elite power struggles and their manipulation; and some others emphasise the importance of cultural rather than economic factors.

The scholars who adhere to the theory of political development consider that the rising aspirations of the people are not adequately met by existing political institutions which are rigid or incompetent. As the gap between the expectations of the people and performance of the system widens, 'political instability and disorder' leading to mass upsurge increases (Huntington 1968). Rajni Kothari argued that 'direct action' is inevitable in the context of India's present-day 'parliamentary democracy'. 'The general climate of frustration, the ineffectiveness of known channels of communication, the alienation and atomisation of the individual, the tendency towards regimentation and the continuous state of conflict (which may remain latent and suppressed for a time) between the rulers and the ruled—all these make the ideal of self-government more and more remote and render parliamentary government an unstable form of political organisation' (1960).

It is also argued by some that public protests have a certain 'functional utility' even in a parliamentary form of government. David Bayley (1962) observes that before and after independence, a large number of the people felt that the institutional means of redress for grievances, frustrations and wrongs—actual or fancied—were inadequate.

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## 2.4 GANDHIAN APPROACH

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Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of India's freedom movement has a far reaching influence on social movements in India during his life time and in the post-independent India. Though Gandhi did not offer systematic analysis on social system, its functioning and causes of conflict, he was a critic of 'modernity' as developed in the West under industrial revolution. He was against capitalist economic system. And, he had deep concern for the poor – poorest of the poor. Conflict in society, according to him is not because of conflicting economic and social interests among the communities/classes. It is because of different 'understanding' of interests and society; different moral and ethical values on good and evil; or prejudices against each other. During his life time he led struggles not only against the British rule but also racial discrimination in South Africa, against untouchability and 'discrimination' to women.

"Purity of means" in social struggles and resolving conflict is the central concern of Gandhian ideology. According to Gandhi the means are as important as the ends in resolving conflict. For that he strongly advocated *ahinsa* i.e. non-violence. Violence he believed, was not only wrong, it was a mistake. It could never really end injustice, because it inflamed the prejudice and fear that fed oppression. For Gandhi, unjust means would never produce a just outcome. "The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree," he wrote in 1909, "and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree... We reap exactly as we sow."

Gandhians advocate a need for resistance of those who are the victims and suffer against injustice. The method of resistance was *satyagraha* i.e *satya* (truth) and *agraha*

(instinctive, holding firmly). Bondurant (1988) has called this approach the “Gandhian dialectic.” *Satyagraha* was a dialectical process where non-violent action (antithesis) engages existing structures of power (thesis) in a truth-seeking struggle leading to a more just and truthful relationship (synthesis).

In this technique the victims oppose unjust law and also the act of the oppressor/ foreign ruler/landlord/upper caste. They even break the ‘unjust’ law and in consequence suffer punishment imposed on them by the authority. Such peaceful resistance, Gandhi believed, would open the eyes of oppressors and weaken the hostility behind repression; rather than adversaries being bullied to capitulate, they would be obliged to see what was right, and that would make them change their minds and actions. But *satyagraha* soon took on a larger dimension, one that was less a function of its spiritual provenance than its feasibility. Gandhi recognised that there were limits to the exemplary value of personal sacrifice: even the most committed resisters could absorb only so much suffering, and the pride and prejudices typical of entrenched regimes could not be dissolved quickly. If *satyagraha* was to become a practical political tool, Gandhi realised, it had to bring pressure to bear on its opponents. “I do not believe in making appeals,” he emphasised on moral force of the opponents.

The potential of *satyagraha* to change an opponent’s position, Gandhi believed, came from the dependence of rulers on the co-operation of those who had the choice to obey or resist. While he continued to argue that *satyagraha* could reveal the truth to opponents and win them over, he often spoke of it in military terms and planned actions that were intended not so much to convert adversaries but to jeopardise their interests if they did not yield. In this way he made *satyagraha* ‘a realistic alternative’ for those more interested in what could produce change than in what conscience could justify.

The method of *satyagraha* is often called as “passive resistance”. But Gandhi made the distinction between the two. In 1920, he argued that they were not synonymous. Passive resistance is generally practice by the weak and non-violence is not their credo. Sometimes it has narrow self-interest which fail to reach out the opponent. But it is not so in *satyagraha*, “.... passive resistance does not necessarily involve complete adherence to truth under every circumstance. Therefore it is different from *satyagraha* in three essentials: *Satyagraha* is a weapon of the strong; it admits of no violence under any circumstance whatever; and it ever insists upon truth.”

David Hardiman calls Gandhi’s method as “dialogical resistance.” For Gandhi the adversary was not an enemy. “It is a breach of *satyagraha* to wish ill to an opponent or to say a harsh word to him or of him with the intention of harming him.” He believed in changing heart and reasoning of the enemy through persuasion and dialogue. But he did not rule out other methods to build pressure on the opponents. “He knew that in many cases, reason by itself would not win an argument. This was where self-inflicted suffering, such as fasting, could be important...additional political pressure was often needed, entailing mass demonstrations, non-co-operation, tax refusal, hartals and like.”

Wehr (1979) has termed Gandhi’s approach to conflict as a self-limiting one. Gandhi was challenging a number of political and social conditions in British India, most notably colonial rule, caste and religious discrimination, and exploitation of workers and peasants. He had to confront these “opponents” but he had to do so without unleashing the enormous potential for violent upheaval existing in the India of that time. His moral

and political philosophies found practical form in methods he used to inhibit runaway responses. To prevent proliferation of issues, for example, Gandhi was careful to focus each *satyagraha* campaign on a single, clear issue around which agreement might be reached. This helped to keep the conflict within bounds. His practice of maintaining good personal relations with his opponents during a campaign prevented the shift from disagreement over an issue to personal antagonism. His policy of complete openness in both interpersonal and media communication reduced the threat and suspicion that secrecy and unpredictability introduce into a conflict.

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## 2.5 RESOURCE MOBILISATION THEORY

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Resource Mobilisation theory is an outcome of rational choice theory. It is based on the assumption that individuals' actions are motivated by goals that express their preferences. They act within the given constraints and available choices. It is not possible for all individuals to get all that they want; they must make choices within the available possibilities at a given point of time. Rational choice theories argue that individuals must make a rational choice regarding what is the best for them in a situation; and accordingly anticipate and calculate the outcome of their actions. "Rational individuals choose the alternatives that is likely to give them the greatest satisfaction".

Some of the proponents of this theory argue that social movements for revolutionary changes by the marginal sections is out of impulse and emotion. Therefore, they do not sustain for long and fail.

It was called resource mobilisation theory because the theory purported to show that the success of a movement depended on the resources available to be used. These resources arose from inducing individuals to participate and contribute to the cost. Individuals participate because they see the benefits to be derived from joining. Success also depends on the movement being able to link to other networks of groups and organisations. The resource mobilisation theory's stress was wholly on the *strategy* to make the movement succeed in demanding for a change in government policies or legislation. Thus it is sometimes said that the theory focused on political action, or the realm of politics rather than on civil society.

Jenkins and Perrow argued that protest and movement formation only occurs when the necessary resources are pumped into it. According to them struggles by powerless and poor groups only take place when rich benefactors take an interest in their struggle and pump resources into it. In the case of the farm workers, Jenkins and Perrow argue that their struggle only got going, properly, when middle class liberals (in the 60s) decided to champion their cause.

Resource mobilisation theory (RMT)

- Reacts against the older view of social movements (e.g. Communism, Nazism) as an irrational protest of the marginalised and as tending to "extremism" (and so illegitimate and "not really political")
- Sees social movements (e.g. black civil rights, environmentalism) as individually rational attempts to mobilise resources in pursuit of "politics by other means" - hence driven by people with resources, embedded in stable networks (and so legitimate political actors!)

- Tends to reproduce professional organiser's perspective (e.g. Greenpeace, Amnesty): tackling the "free rider" problem to build strong and effective movements (Freeman) through organisation and selective incentives for participation

The theory emphasises entrepreneurial skill of the leaders of the movements. They mobilise resources — professional, finances, moral support and networking- from within and outside to sustain their struggles. The leaders of the successful movements have skill to create organisation and mobilise people. In the process common goals are articulated and consensus is created so that all the participants accept the goals.

Rajendra Singh summarises the major assumptions of RMT. They are:

- a) social movements must be understood in terms of conflict model of collective action;
- b) there is no basic difference between institutional and non-institutional collective actions;
- c) both institutional and non-institutional collective actions contain conflicts of interests built in the system of institutionalised power relations;
- d) social movements involve the rational pursuit of interests by competing groups;
- e) goals and grievances, conflicts and contestations are inherently present in all relations of power, and as such, they themselves cannot explain the formation of social movements;
- f) the formation of social movements, therefore, is determined by the changes in resources, organisation and opportunities for collective action;
- g) success and effectiveness of collective action is understood in terms of material benefit or the actor being recognised as a political person; and
- h) finally, as Jenkins visualises, the mobilisation of men in contemporary social movements involves the use of large-scale, advanced communication techniques, bureaucratised organisation and utilitarian drives and initiatives. (2001)

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## 2.6 RELATIVE DEPRIVATION THEORY

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The theory of relative deprivation developed by American scholars (Gurr 1970) has also guided some studies on agitation and mass movements.

Relative deprivation is defined as actors' perception of discrepancy between their value expectations and their environment's apparent value capabilities. Value expectations are the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are justifiably entitled. The referents of value capabilities are to be found largely in the social and physical environment; they are the conditions that determine people's perceived chances of getting or keeping the values they legitimately expect to attain. Gurr writes: "The frustration-aggression and the related threat-aggression mechanisms provide the basic motivational link between Relative Deprivation and the potential for collective violence". Gurr also links three other concepts to relative deprivation, namely dissonance, anomie and conflict. The second of these, anomie is important in its effect to value opportunities. There are three models as to how the differentiation of value expectations and value capabilities



has impact on relative deprivation. Decremental deprivation model describes the situation where the expectations are stable but capabilities declines. In aspirational model the capabilities remain the same but the expectations increase. The last model, J-curve or progressive deprivation model, fits to the situations when expectations and capabilities first increase hand in hand but then capabilities stop to increase or decrease while expectations still go on.

Those who perceive deprivation and as a result experience a feeling of frustration become aggressive. They are 'jealous' of those who have more. They protest or revolt against those who have more. They do not deal with the sources of deprivation. For Gurr, 'deprivation' is primarily psychological; therefore, he does not deal with the socio-economic structure which is the source of deprivation. If such sense of deprivation is confined to an individual against another individual it leads to crime. When it becomes collective perception – deprivation of region, community or caste – it takes the form of collective action. But it is not accompanied with ideology for the social system, it remains a protest or rebellion and hardly takes a form of social movement. They become 'temporary aberrations' rather than as 'ongoing processes of change'. Relative deprivation is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for protest movements. M.S. A. Rao argues, 'a sufficient level of understanding and reflection is required on the part of the participants, and they must be able to observe and perceive the contrast between the social and cultural conditions of the privileged and those of the deprived, and must realise that it is possible to do something about it' (1979: 207).

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## 2.7 SUMMARY

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Approach or theoretical framework help us to understand social movements in more meaningful way. They are useful to give meaning to the facts and also valuable guide to those who are active in movements. Among all the most important approach is the Marxist perspective. It is also called classical approach or old approach. The list of approaches given above is not exhaustive. There are also approaches like behavioral, cognitive, multilevel and on. But they are not widely used by the scholars to study social movements. Within each approach there are different shades for analysis.

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## 2.8 EXERCISES

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- 1) What is the importance of theoretical framework in understanding social movements?
- 2) What is the significance of "class conflict" in Marxist framework to analyse social movements?
- 3) How 'subaltern studies' approach differs from the mainstream Marxist approach?
- 4) Is social movement dis-functional to the functioning of political system? Why?
- 5) "Purity of means is the central to Gandhian approach" Explain.
- 6) Explain the main features of Gandhian form of *Satyagraha*.
- 7) Discuss Resource Mobilisation theory in social movement literature.
- 8) Explain the importance of Relative Deprivation theory in the analysis of social movements.



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## **UNIT 3 CLASSIFICATION OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS INCLUDING NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

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### **Structure**

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Reform, Rebellion and Revolution
- 3.3 New Social Movements
- 3.4 Issue-based Movements
- 3.5 Classification by Social Categories
- 3.6 Summary
- 3.7 Exercises

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### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

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Classification is a way of selecting and arranging facts/data. It is a way to give meaning to one's observations. There is no the way of classifying any social phenomenon, process or group of people. Social movements also do not have the only one way of classification. No classification is sacrosanct and universal acceptable by all the scholars and activists. Classification is related to theoretical framework and the question that one wants to understand? Same movement can be classified in several ways depending upon the focus of the study. For instance a collective struggle of people raising issue of pollution can be called environment movement and also human rights movement or middle class movement or reformist movement or new social movement. In this unit we shall explain some of the typologies of the movements as used by different scholars and underlying rationale for such taxonomy.

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### **3.2 REFORM, REBELLION AND REVOLUTION**

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Generally those who follow Marxist framework examine social movements in terms of their potentialities for revolutionary transformation in society. They characterise the movements in reference to not only of the participants and leaders' ideology as well as their immediate and long term objectives but also the scholars' own expectations from social movements. In this framework the movements are classified on the basis of what they attain or likely to attain and the objectives of the collective action against the political system. According to this theoretical perspective social movements are of three types: revolt or rebellion, reform, and revolution. Revolt or rebellion protests against the political system or regime and may also make attempts to change in the authority – government and/or ruling elite/ rulers. But it does not question nor it aims at changing the political system. In short, the movement is against the regime rather than the system. A revolt is a challenge to political authority, aimed at overthrowing the government. A rebellion is an attack on existing authority without any intention of seizing state power to change the system.

The social movement which aims at bringing certain changes in the system and not transforming the system completely is called reformist movement. Such movements question the functioning of political institutions and build pressure on the government

to introduce certain changes in their structure and procedures. While doing so they do not question the political system as a whole; nor do they relate a political institution with the larger political structure. In other words they focus on reforming a particular part of an institution or the system. For example, the movement that primarily aims at changing election rules and procedures does not relate elections with the economic structure and power relationship in society. In that sense it is reformist movement. Or, various social reform movements try to reform certain customs like child marriage or dowry, norms such as animal sacrifice, untouchability; or social arrangements such as hierarchical order in status and social mobility rather than challenging the whole social order based on pollution and purity around the principles of inequality. When women's movements struggle to have reservation for women in the parliament it is reformist movement aiming at changing the representation system. Reform does not challenge the political system per se. It attempts to bring about changes in the relations between the parts of the system in order to make it more efficient, responsive and workable.

In a revolution, a section or sections of society launch an organised struggle to overthrow not only the established government and regime but also the socio-economic structure which sustains it, and replace the structure by an alternative social order. For instance the Naxalite movement is not only challenging the particular government but aims at over-throwing the state which is feudal/semi-feudal and desires to establish communist state. Or the dalit movement aims at transforming social order based on caste system and desires to create egalitarian social system. In the same way when women movement challenges patriarchy in society and attempts its abolition then it becomes revolutionary movement.

Nature of social movements often overlaps. Many movements undergo change in the course of time. Some apparently reformist movements may take revolutionary course; and some which begin with revolutionary agenda become reformist also. All social movements do not necessarily begin with clear objectives in terms of the maintenance or the transformation of the system. They often get shaped in the process through the leaders, participants and ideology.

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### **3.3 NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

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The classification based on Marxist theoretical framework focusing on class structure of the participants, with ultimate objectives to overthrow the present state aiming at bringing total change in production relation is considered as 'old' social movement. They are also called classical movements. These movements, it is argued, primarily focus on the state power and on class consciousness of the participants. The examples of the peasant or working class movement against the feudal/semi-feudal economic structure fall in this category.

As against this, some of the recent movements particularly in and after the 1960s in Europe such as peace movement, ecological movement, women's movement etc. are called 'new' social movement. In India the movements around the issue of identity – dalit, adivasi, women, human rights, environment etc. are also labeled as the 'new' social movement. In one sense they are called 'new' social movements because they have raised the issues related to identity and autonomy which are non-class issues and

do not confront with the state. They are the new forms of social movements. However, it is simplistic to say that in the past people did not raise and struggled for identity and autonomy. For instance the Birsa Munda movement in Chhota Nagpur during the 1830s was the struggle to resist the intervention of the British state in their life. It was the movement to protect their autonomy. According to K.S. Singh (1966) the movement aimed at the “liquidation of the racial enemies, the Dikus, European missionaries and officials and the native Christians. The Mundas would recover their ‘lost kingdom’. There will be enough to eat, no famine, the people will live together in love”. So it is not correct to say in the past people did not struggle for identity and autonomy. In fact as Andre Gunder Frank and Marta Fuentes (2002) argue that the ‘classical’ working class movements are the product of the 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial society. “On the other hand, peasant, localist community, ethnic/nationalist, religious, and even feminist/ women’s movements have existed for centuries and even millennia in many parts of the world (2002).” Therefore the ‘old’ and new’ are not related to time. They differ in their features.

The scholars who reject the framework of the classical or Marxist framework identify the following characteristics of the ‘new’ social movements.

- 1) The New Social Movements (NSM) are not directing their collective action to state power. They are concerned with individual and collective morality. Andre Gunder Frank and Marta Fuentes find that NSMs “share the force of morality and a sense of (in)justice in individual motivation, and the force of social mobilisation in developing social power. Individual membership or participation and motivation in all sorts of social movements contain a strong moral component and defensive concern with justice in the social and world order. (2002).”
- 2) The new social movements are not class-based. They are multi-class. In fact, they do not subscribe to the theory that society is divided on class line and the classes are antagonistic. The new social movements are either ethnic or nationalist and plural. Women’s movement is an example. Gail Omvedt treats the contemporary farmers’ movement as ‘new’ and non-class movement. It is a movement of small and poor as well as middle and rich farmers. These movements, she argues also have support of agriculture labourers. It also has support of shopkeepers and also of high and low castes. She argues,
 

“ideologies of the farmers’ movement thus provided a clear challenge to Marxism that limited its analysis only to capital-labour struggles as defined within a realm of commodity exchange; they looked to a wider arena of capital accumulation and economic exploitation taking into account factors other than class defined in the narrow sense, and in many ways their thrust coincided with that of the developing environmental movements (1993).”
- 3) The new social movements are confined to and concern with civil society. According to the proponents of NSM “civil society is getting diminished; its social space is suffering a shrinkage and the ‘social’ of the civil society is eroded by the controlling ability of the state. The expansion of the state, in the contemporary setting, coincides with the expansion of the market. State and market are seen as two institutions making inroads into all aspects of the citizen’s life. Under the combined impact of the forces of the state and the market, society grows helpless. Consequently, the

NSMs raise the issue of the 'self-defense' of the community and society against the increasing expansion of the state apparatuses: agencies of surveillance and social control.(Singh 2001)".

- 4) NSMs are not around economic issues of land, wages or property. They are primarily concerned with self- identity and autonomy of an individual and community against the state, market and social institutions. Therefore, dalit movement for dignity and adivasis movement for their autonomy are treated as NSM.
- 5) NSMs are not concerned for the benefit of one class or group. They are concerned for the good of every one irrespective of class. Environmental movement in that sense according to some scholars, is NSM as it does not raise the issue of a particular class.
- 6) For some NSMs are grassroots or micro movements and do not have to capture state power on their agenda. They are democratic in their organisational structure. According to Jean Cohen NSMs raise issue which emerge from society rather than form state and economy. They are concerned with democratisation in day to day life. They focus on communication and identity. According to Rajendra Singh "the aim of NSM is to recognise the relations between state, society and the economy, and to create a public space in which democratic discourse on autonomy and freedom of the individual and collectivities, their identities and orientations could be discussed and examined. In its many expressions, the NSMs generally confine themselves to social action with a spirit of what Cohen calls 'self limiting radicalism' (2001)".

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### **3.4 ISSUE-BASED MOVEMENTS**

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Some of those who follow structure-function approach classify social movements on the basis of issues around which people are mobilised. People do get mobilised around number of issues from local and immediate to systemic and long term. They vary from time to time and from society to society. Some times the issue-based classification treat different issue separately. Sometimes issues are conceptualised in theoretical framework such as developmental, livelihood, human Right issues or political, economic, cultural and social issues; or local, regional and national issues. Classification of the issues depends upon scholars' perspective. For instance the movement of the dam-affected people can be called as 'rehabilitation' movement of dam-affected people and it can also be called as anti-development movement or human right movement.

Similarly, struggles of the forest-dwellers can be classified into : forest movement, civil rights or livelihood movement or movement for common resources.

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### **3.5 CLASSIFICATION BY SOCIAL CATEGORIES**

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Those who follow Marxist frame work often classify social movements on the basis of classes such as peasant movement or rich peasant movement, working class movement or middle class movement and so on. Those who follow cultural or community framework divide movements on the basis of community such as ethnic movement, western movements, black movement, dalit movement etc. Sometimes social categories are divided by region such urban and rural. Movements may also be classified on economic

as well as ethnic categories and also by issues together. Some others classify movements on the basis of the participants, such as peasants, tribals, students, women, dalits, etc. In many cases the participants and issues go together.

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### **3.6 SUMMARY**

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Classification is a tool for analysis. It is closely related with theoretical framework. Hence classification of social movements vary from scholar to scholar depending upon his/her analytical framework. Important guide for classification is: what do you want to find out? Or what is your purpose of classification. Now a days social movements are classified into (1) old or classical and (2) new. The former falls into Marxist framework. It is based on the objectives and class characters of the participants. New social movements are those which are of non-class and around the issues of identity and autonomy. Movements are also classified by issues and/ social class of the participants.

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### **3.7 EXERCISES**

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- 1) “No classification of social movements is sacrosanct” Explain.
- 2) Discuss the difference between reform and revolutionary movement.
- 3) Why ‘new’ social movements are called ‘new’?
- 4) What are the main features of ‘new’ social movements?
- 5) Give some examples of issue-based movements.
- 6) Give examples of classification based on social classes.

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## **UNIT 4 DEMOCRATISATION AND CHANGING NATURE OF INDIAN SOCIETY**

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### **Structure**

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Social Reforms and Inequalities During Colonial Period
- 4.3 The Idea of Social Transformation in the Wake of Independence
- 4.4 People's Movements as Reflection of Democracy and Social Change
- 4.5 Backward Classes' and Dalits' Challenge to the Dominance of Upper Castes
- 4.6 State, Democracy and Change
  - 4.6.1 Caste
  - 4.6.2 Gender
- 4.7 Liberalisation, Poverty and Social Change
- 4.8 Human Development Index and Reality
- 4.9 Summary
- 4.10 Exercises

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### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

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A close look at the developments in India after independence brings us to the realisation that establishment of democracy – economic development coupled with the idea of distributive justice has transformed a traditional society. The state has been the central instrument of change. Politics has performed the role of an agent in facilitating this transformation. When India set out on its journey as an independent nation, in spite of our claim of being a democratic republic the political participation was constrained by social and economic inequalities. Nevertheless, periodic elections at national, state and local levels have encouraged vigorous participation of traditionally suppressed and deprived sections of society. It can be said that democracy has proved to be a weapon against the privileges and powers of the few. Social and economic changes have gone a long way in relaxing the grip of rigid hierarchical structures, social discrimination and cultural attitudes. In spite of these positive developments India still has to contend with mass poverty, illiteracy, communal violence and atrocities against women. This unit deals with the democratisation of Indian society and nature changes which have taken place in it.

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### **4.2 SOCIAL REFORMS AND INEQUALITIES DURING COLONIAL PERIOD**

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The social reform movements of the nineteenth century attacked caste system, which was graded into hierarchy of status. At the bottom of this caste system were placed the untouchables who constituted nearly twenty five per cent of the Hindu population and suffered the worst form of discrimination. They were not allowed to enter temples or to use tanks, wells and irrigation canals used by the higher castes. They could not go to schools in which children of upper castes studied. Entry to the public services like police or army was banned for them. The only option before them was of entering the



menial jobs considered to be unclean like scavenging, removing dead bodies, etc. In some parts of the country even their presence was considered polluting. Among the social movements mention must be made of some of them such as the one led by Jyotiba Phule in Maharashtra and Sri Narayan Guru in Kerala. These movements questioned the caste system and caste-based inequality. Gandhi made abolition of untouchability an integral part of the freedom movement. He made efforts to make the upper castes realise the enormity of injustice done through the practice of untouchability. He opposed British attempt to treat untouchables as separate from the Hindus. B.R. Ambedkar who belonged to Mahar caste, an untouchable caste, in Maharashtra emerged as a powerful leader of the untouchables in the late 1920s. He fought against caste system and was in favour of separate electorate for the untouchables. His argument was that socially segregated should be politically segregated. When in 1932 the Communal Award provided for separate electorate Gandhi went on fast against it. Ambedkar agreed to sign the Poona Pact according to which untouchables were given reserved seats within the general Hindu category.

For centuries women in India have been subjected to oppressions of different kind. This has been legitimised by various religions practiced in the country as well. They were not supposed to have a personality of their own; they were seen as an adjunct of their husband's personality. The traditional views had a great appreciation for the role of a wife or a mother but consigned women as individuals to a low position. Prevalence of practices like polygamy, purdah, child marriage and custom of Sati undermined their position. Hindu women had no right to inherit property while Muslim women could inherit only half as much as a man could. The social reform movement all over the country had a common theme and it was improvement in the condition of women.

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### **4.3 THE IDEA OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE WAKE OF INDEPENDENCE**

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Several members of the Constituent Assembly were of the view that the values and institutions of liberal democracy would transform India's tradition-bound social structure. Austin is of the view that the members of the Constituent Assembly opted for the Westminster model of liberal democracy. A liberal model of democracy based on the ideas of individual choice, consent, liberty and equality was seen as a liberating alternative to the old traditional organisation of life based on customs, ascriptive status, hierarchy and inequality. According to Austin it was also because of our familiarity with the working of these institutions under the colonial period. The Preamble of the Constitution promises to secure to all its citizens justice social, economic and political. In the Preamble priority was given to the concept of justice as compared to the idea of liberty, equality and fraternity and to social and economic as compared to political justice. The order of the words indicates that social and economic justices were considered to be the fundamental norm of the constitution of India. The democratic society visualised by the makers of Indian constitution lays due emphasis on building a just society.

Liberal Democracy was found only in those countries whose economy was predominantly capitalist. What took place in these societies was democratisation of liberalism and liberalisation of democracy. The emphasis on economic justice as stated in the Preamble and through various provision of the Directive Principles of State Policy attempted to

allay the bias of liberal democracy towards economic inequality. Members of the Constituent Assembly were optimistic about the potential of the democratic institutions provided by the constitution to transform Indian society. Sarvepali Radhakrishnan held that modern parliamentary democracy would bring about a fundamental change in the structures of Indian society. K.M. Pannikar in his book, *Hindu Society at Cross Road* published in 1955 expressed his views that Parliamentary Democracy based on universal adult franchise presented the masses with the dynamite for the destruction of social institutions based on privileges and inequalities. The introduction of civil liberties gave even the mute people a voice. The introduction of Universal Adult Franchise extended the right to exercise franchise even to the poor and uneducated. W.H. Morris-Jones rejected the need of a strong government for eradication of poverty and reduction of inequalities. He held that the most substantial erosion of poverty took place in Western Europe only after liberal democracy had been extended far enough to create strong pressures from the ranks of the disadvantaged. He firmly believed that democracy could be used by the disadvantaged as a weapon against the established privileges and power of the few.

At the time of independence the Indian state was being run by an elite political class which was primarily made of upper caste males. They also had preeminence of urban English educated Brahmins who shared secular outlook. The government under the Congress Party was a continuation of the British rule because like the British it did not attempt to change the social order but to adapt to it. Attempt by the parliament and the Congress Party to provide for economic social and educational upliftment of the underprivileged sections have largely been symbolic. The Congress Party adopted a conciliatory approach to the privileged and did not show much interest in organising poorer section of society for political action.

The Rise of backward classes (this is a broad category which includes middle peasants as well as poor peasant cases) in Bihar and U.P. emerged as important political force from the 1960s in opposition to the Congress Party which was dominated by the upper castes. The land reforms in these states were only partially successful. However, they had undermined the powers of the upper caste landlords and benefited the backward castes. The intermediate backward caste middle and rich peasants Yadavs, Jats, Kurmiers, Gujars etc. also benefited from the Green Revolution, community development programmes, panchayati raj and the cooperatives. This newly acquired economic power made them restless to translate it into political supremacy. This was expressed through formation of many farmers' parties in the 1960s. This development in the post-independence period is seen as the first democratic upsurge. This period witnessed an expansion in the democratic base of the Indian democracy. As political competition became serious an alternative to one party dominance of the Congress Party seemed to be emerging. In the beginning this group identified itself with socialists and various political outfits launched by Chaudhary Charan Singh from time to time. In these states struggles were raised for replacing the dominance of the upper castes by winning seats in legislatures and staking claims for reservation in government jobs. Similar pattern was witnessed in several other states of the country with the rise of backward classes — Marathas in Maharashtra, Patels in Gujarat, Vokkaligas and Lingayats in Karnataka and Reddies and Kammas in Andhra Pradesh.

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## 4.4 PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS AS REFLECTION OF DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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The 1970s represents a watershed development. Indira Gandhi was attempting to strengthen the popular base of the state by a series of measures like bank nationalisation, abolition of privy purses and nationalisation of insurance. Policies targeting specific groups like SCs, STs, rural poor and workers were also made with the same objective. Indira Gandhi appealed directly to the vast masses of the rural and urban poor whose conditions had not improved even after three decades of independence. The appeal to this group and the slogan of *Garibi Hatao* translated in to electoral victory for the Congress Party led by Indira Gandhi in 1971 General Election and the Assembly Election of 1972. By the beginning of 1973 Indira Gandhi started to decline. People's expectations had remained unfulfilled. The policies of the government had failed to make dent in rural or urban poverty. The Congress Party was increasingly seen not as a party, which was interested in radical social change but as a party endorsing and reinforcing inequality. The country was faced with myriad problems like price rise, industrial stagnation, continuous failure of monsoons and large-scale unemployment. Agitations and protests were the order of the day. Poor peasant movements were going on in different parts of the country against the oppression of the landlords. Firstly Gujarat and then Bihar became theatres of popular movements yearning for change. Jay Prakash Narayan popularly known as JP came out of political oblivion to lead the Bihar Movement and gave a call for Total Revolution. Very soon he took the movement outside Bihar. This movement received support from students, middle classes and a section of the intelligentsia. It also got support from almost all the non-left parties who had failed to defeat the Congress Party in the 1971 Election. Ghanshyam Shah refuses to accept this movement as revolution because it did not have any revolutionary ideology, cadre and organisational network to implement its agenda.

The Janata government's attempt to implement twenty five per cent reservation for the Backward Castes met with stiff resistance from the upper castes. This issue polarised the backwards and forwards throughout the state. The backward castes Movement grew stronger in the state by forging alliance with poor peasants among Rajputs, Scheduled Castes and Muslims. This group supported the Janata Dal, which ousted Congress (I) at the national level in 1989 and in the state assembly emerged as the single largest party in 1990. The defeat of the Congress (I) by the Janata Dal led by V.P. Singh at the center in 1989 and several states in 1990 marked the disintegration of long established pattern of mobilisation in the northern India and also marshalling out of cooperation among the disadvantaged groups. It had become possible because of an alignment between Rajputs and relatively more prosperous backward castes like Yadavs, Jats and Kurmis and other backward castes. They were also supported by Muslims, traditionally a vote bank for the Congress Party.

The 1990s have witnessed a participatory upsurge among the disadvantaged section of society. Before the 1970s the urban participation used to be higher than the rural participation. But now rural participation has overtaken urban participation. There has been tremendous rise in the participation of women in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. This period has also registered a definite upswing in the electoral participation of the tribals. The dalit participation is higher in UP than in Bihar, MP and Rajasthan.

Yogendra Yadav is of the opinion that perhaps India is only country where the participation of the disadvantaged section has overtaken that of the privileged section. Yadav is of the view that this upsurge in electoral participation does not pose a threat to the democratic system in India because there is no sign of widespread erosion in the legitimacy of the system or mounting frustration among the participants. This is not in agreement with S.P. Huntington's theory, which looks at excessive participation in absence of early institutionalisation as a recipe for revolution, of rising frustration and eventual collapse of democracy.

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#### **4.5 BACKWARD CLASSES' AND DALITS' CHALLENGE TO THE DOMINANCE OF UPPER CASTES**

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The introduction of the universal adult franchise, periodic elections and of democratic consciousness led to forward caste dominance being challenged by first the middle castes and then by the dalits. Capturing power by the OBCs and dalits appears to be a panacea for the inequalities of status and income in-built in to the caste system. Laloo Yadav came to power by giving the slogan smash the upper castes [*Bhura bal saf karo*]. The prime concern of the leaders from these groups is gaining government positions. Similarly, the BSP used slogans like *mat hamara raj tumhara nahin chalega* or *vote se lenge PM/CM arakshan se SP/DM*. They do not have faith in reforms. They aim at achieving social change not through social reforms but by share in political and administrative power. The Dalits and the other backward castes are by no means natural allies except for the fact that both these groups have been the victims of upper caste dominance and they stand to gain from the decline of this dominance. Between them they share a relationship of animosity, doubt and suspicion. There are instances of atrocities on dalits in many parts of the country by people belonging to other backward castes over question of wages, use of water from tanks or wells or other trivial matters.

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#### **4.6 STATE, DEMOCRACY AND CHANGE**

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In the north more particularly in the states of UP and Bihar state machinery, police, block development officer, village level workers and leadership of local Panchayati Raj Institutions were biased in favour of the rural rich. According to Ghanshyam Shah there existed a fraternisation between rural rich and bureaucracy. This was because most of the bureaucracy came from the same section of the society. The leadership of the political parties was also in the hands of the same section of society. They sent most of the MPs and MLAs to national parliament and state assemblies. The panchayat leadership also used to be in the hands of people from the same section of society. All this led to funds for rural development being cornered by the well off sections of society because upper caste dominated political system bureaucracy and panchayati raj institution did not show necessary concern and commitment to the needs of the poor. The whole picture seems to have changed now.

##### **4.6.1 Caste**

The rise of the other backward castes movement and dalit movement has challenged the upper caste dominance. The complexion of national parliament and state assemblies has changed with more and more MPs and MLAs from these sections. The demand to

implement reservation policy was not just for some jobs to unemployed youth from these sections of society but also for the crucial role they play in delivery of public funds. When Mayawati became Chief Minister she replaced upper caste officials holding key posts like chief secretary, CM's private secretary with scheduled caste officers. The same thing happened in Bihar with Laloo Yadav's rise in power where the upper caste officers were replaced by those belonging to the OBCs. The reservation of seats in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) for SCs, STs and women provided by 73rd amendment can work as a bulwark against these organisations being manipulated for the benefit of the rural rich only.

Among the important programmes launched by Mayawati during her Chief Ministership was Ambedkar village development scheme providing development funds to 15000 Ambedkar villages with thirty per cent dalit population. But the dalit and backward class assertion is concentrating more on status and dignity and less on economic inequalities. Erecting statues of the non-Brahmin leaders like Jyotiba Phule, Periar/EV Ramaswamy Naicker, Ambedkar and Sahu Maharaj and installation of Ambedkar statues in every village and town were meant for fighting upper caste hegemony and boosting the status of the dalits. The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) government in Bihar renamed many universities after non-upper caste leaders in the similar way. But these leaders have failed to address themselves to the problems of structural inequality. Land reform is not on their agenda. They have also failed to address themselves to the economic and extra-economic exploitation of the weaker section. The track record of the RJD government is even worse in this regard. It has been treating the Naxalite Movement as purely a law and order problem. This is also true about the approach of the TDP government towards PWG movement in Andhra Pradesh. They fail to realise that most of the issues raised by them can be seen as demand for better wages, dignity and land reforms. The state seems to be shying away from its commitment to economic justice.

In Tamil Nadu the politics of accommodation followed by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagams has not caused much disturbance although the level of reservation has risen to 68 per cent including fifteen per cent for scheduled castes. The government provided opportunities for people from the lower castes in government jobs. The upper castes excluded from government jobs had no reason to sulk because they were encouraged to run privately founded engineering and medical colleges. These institutions were sustained by capitation fees charged from the students and were affiliated with state universities. This strategy together with social welfare measures for weaker section of society stabilised the support for the government without threatening the interest of landed upper castes or business classes. Kerala has benefited from public policies directed to whole population. This state has witnessed general improvement in life expectancy, literacy, and above all dignity of dalits. It is mainly due to general welfare policies of the state. On the whole in south India reservation for backward castes and expenditure on social welfare programmes sustained the politics of accommodation because it offered small number of disadvantaged castes to join the urban middle class by providing them opportunities to join politics and getting into government jobs.

#### **4.6.2 Gender**

Dramatic changes have taken place in the status of women since independence. The constitution promised complete equality to women. Women like men also got right to



vote. B.R. Ambedkar, the law minister after independence submitted a bill that raised the age of consent and marriage, upheld monogamy, gave women right to divorce, maintenance and inheritance and treated dowry as stridhan or woman's property. This bill faced stiff opposition from the conservative section of society. The bill had to be postponed because of this. Finally important sections of the bill got passed in four separate acts: The Hindu Marriage Act, the Hindu Succession Act, The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act and the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act. The extension of legal rights to Hindu women was not sufficient but it was definitely a bold step. This can be gauged from the stiff opposition faced by the government while extending the same legal rights to women from other religious communities. In 1985 the Supreme Court granted a pittance to Sahsp Bano, a divorced Muslim Woman; the conservatives among Muslim community created so much of furor in the name of interference in the Muslim personal law that Rajeev Gandhi's government wilted and introduced a bill in the parliament to negate the Supreme Court judgment. Some legal rights have been exercised even as some have remained on paper. The right to vote has been taken seriously by women even in rural areas. Many times they take free decisions independent of their husbands about whom to vote. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts have provided for reservation of 33 per cent seats in local self-government institution both urban and local for women. It has played an important role in correcting gender bias in our political and social life. But the promises to reserve seats in parliament have not been met yet. Kerala has achieved 86 per cent adult literacy rate among women. After Kerala Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu have achieved remarkable success in female literacy. The population of rural females aged 12-14 who have never been to any school is one half in India as a whole, above two third in U.P., M.P. and Bihar, and as high as 82 per cent in Rajsthan.

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## 4.7 LIBERALISATION, POVERTY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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Although the major Indian political parties contrived to mobilise the poor on the basis of community and not class, this does not mean that economic differentiation has ceased to be criteria to understand Indian politics. Except in Kerala and West Bengal the unorganised majority of the poor peasantry, agricultural labour, artisans and workers in informal sectors have become dependent on social welfare programmes sponsored by the central government. Even the redistributive programmes introduced in the early 1970s at the height of the *Garibi Hatao* campaign could not make any significant impact because of lack of commitment. In the 1990s the state in India has embarked upon the path of liberalisation. It was partly a response to depleting foreign exchange reserve and partly under pressure from world financial institution namely World Bank and IMF. The Indian state capitulated under pressure from western financial institutions into policy formation and running of state. Liberalisation is primarily beneficial to upper and middle classes. An estimated forty million Indians are living the life styles comparable to their counterparts in advanced industrial economies. Another sixty millions are on the threshold of comfortable middle class living. This middle class is going to proliferate because of the proliferation of the service sectors and white-collar jobs. There is a fear that it may further aggravate the condition of rural and urban poor. The Indian state has been ineffective in creating human base for development. The lack of basic education, gender rights, health facilities and employment opportunities for a big chunk of the population does not go well with the goal of economic justice. Marginalised groups who



are not organised are not in a position to pressurise the state to fulfill its welfare commitments.

The imperatives of economic liberalisation are identified with an aggravation of conflict between economic and political interest of the disadvantaged. Liberalisation is creating avenues for business and white-collar jobs to I.I.T and I.I.M. professionals. This suits the interests of the upper and middle class because they have the wherewithal like capital to benefit from new business opportunities opening up as part of liberalisation package. The youth from this section are more likely to walk away with jobs in Multi National Corporations with astronomical salaries because of their access to quality education. With privatisation and disinvestments becoming order of the day the number of jobs in public sector are going to be less and less. The benefit of reservation is available only in government jobs. That is why many dalit leaders look at liberalisation as a conspiracy to deny them the benefit of reservation. Economic development so far has failed to create enough jobs to absorb the landless and rural and urban educated. These people have to suffer deprivations of various kinds. Agricultural labourers, marginal and small peasants with small or no patch of land are the most deprived section of society. They suffer more than others from poverty and lack of education, health and housing facilities.

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#### **4.8 HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX AND REALITY**

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Social and economic development in India is marred with wide prevalence of poverty, inequality, social injustice and poor quality of life. Despite remarkable achievements on the front of economic growth and political democracy India has entered the twenty first century with low per capita income, intolerably low level of literacy and a very low position on the world index of human resource development. In the early sixties the Planning Commission formulated the concept of poverty line. Below this line were people whose consumption especially of food grains, did not come up to a minimum level in terms of calories. In 1971 nearly fifty nine per cent of the population was living below poverty line. Since then poverty has been registering a steady decline. In 1994 it stood at thirty six per cent. Nearly three million people equal to the population of India at the time of independence are still below poverty line. Another fact about poverty is that it varies from area to area. In Bihar nearly sixty three percent people are below poverty line despite the anti-poverty programmes launched by the government because of the corruption. The main brunt of poverty is borne by poor peasants, agricultural labourer and the urban poor. The problem of poverty is further compounded by the existence of glaring social and economic inequality. While the poor have not become poorer actually (they have benefited from economic growth) the gap between poor and rich has widened and is likely to widen further in the age of liberalisation. The fruits of development have been and are being disproportionately cornered by the upper and the middle class.

In the latest index of human development compiled by the United Nations Development Programme in 1999 India was ranked 132 out 147 countries covered. Life expectancy at birth, infant mortality rate and literacy among other things has been taken into account while compiling this index. A comparison of the record of colonial period with post-independence period makes us realise that India's achievements have been creditable. But a comparison with even our neighboring countries reveals that we are lagging far

behind them in regard to these important areas. An Indian's life expectancy at the time of birth was 32 years in 1950. It went up to 63 years in 1998 which seems to be quite impressive but it was 69.8 years and 73.1 years in 1997 in China and Sri Lanka respectively. Infant mortality rate per 1000 live births which was 227 in 1941 had fallen to 71 in 1997. However, it was much lower for China (38) and for Sri Lanka (17) in 1997. Another sad fact about India is that too many women still die at the time of child birth. The current maternity mortality rate per hundred thousand live births in India is as high as 507 compared to 95 in China and 140 in Sri Lanka. But the biggest problem faced by India is persistence of high illiteracy. In 1952 nearly 82 per cent of Indians were illiterate. Even in 1997 it was as high 38 per cent. The comparative figure for China and Sri Lanka were as low as 17.1 and 9.3 per cent respectively. Moreover, the gender gap in case of literacy was astonishingly high in India nearly twice as many women being illiterate as men.

A tangible outcome of the democratic process launched in India after independence clearly seems to be that it has succeeded in giving a voice to the marginalised. Around the middle of 1990s there has been an upsurge in political organisations and electoral participation of the disadvantaged groups. The Congress Party, which shied away from giving proper representation to the disadvantaged, is facing routs in many parts of the country. New parties have tried to correct the imbalance in representation. The most conspicuous outcome of the long process of social churning has been increase in representation of lower castes in government more particularly at regional and local level. The balance of power has shifted from the hands of upper castes to the backward and lower castes. Another significant development is the rise of BJP to national power supported by the middle and upper classes. This social block has the potential of denying the gains from the democratic upsurge of the lower castes. The BJP's commitment to India as a Hindu nation has led to redefinition of Indian nationalism by giving a distorted meaning to secularism. It is backward looking and upper caste dominated, and seems very appealing to the elite and educated Indians whose interest is threatened by popular movements and lower caste assertions.

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## 4.9 SUMMARY

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To sum up, it can be said that democratisation more particularly universal adult franchise, more or less free and fair elections, mobilisation of the disadvantaged section of society has played a very important role in replacing an order dominated by the upper castes. This has changed the complexion of our parliament and government with more and more representatives from the disadvantaged sections. The dalits, minorities and the women have started raising questions about who is responsible for their grinding poverty. They have benefited from their movements and organisations and have learnt to extract gains from political parties in exchange of their support.

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## 4.10 EXERCISES

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- 1) Discuss how the social reforms and inequalities were related during the colonial period.
- 2) Write a note on the relationship between the peoples' movements and social change.
- 3) Explain the changes in Indian society with reference to the caste.
- 4) Write a note on the impact of liberalisation on the changes in Indian society.

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## UNIT 5 GLOBALISATION AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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### Structure

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Meaning of Globalisation
- 5.3 Impact of Globalisation
- 5.4 Globalisation, Social Movements and Developing Countries
- 5.5 Globalisation and Social Movements in India
  - 5.5.1 Farmers
  - 5.5.2 Working Classes
  - 5.5.3 Middle Classes
  - 5.5.4 Women
  - 5.5.5 Networking and Cooperation
- 5.6 Summary
- 5.7 Exercise

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### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

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This unit deals with the relationship between globalisation and social movements. Globalisation has brought profound transformation in the lives of people everywhere and it has immense potential to affect social, political and economic conditions globally. The critics of globalisation look at it as a process that can increase disparities of wealth and power. They are of the view that economic liberalisation is exacerbating the gap between rich and poor virtually in all developing regions. Globalisation has empowered some countries more than others. Rules and norms about investment, environmental management and social policy are made by these countries because they have power to control international institutions. Less powerful countries even more than in past are becoming rule-takers. The advocates of globalisation focus on the opportunities that are seen as its concomitant. It has ensued a process that may change class structure, reinforcing cosmopolitanism. Globalisation is also transforming people's definitions of selfhood and identity. It is also averred that it has an inherent bias in favour of the middle class and hurts the interests of the underprivileged in material sense. The phase of globalisation has been charged with being a phase of jobless growth. The labour sector has witnessed retrenchment, voluntary retirement schemes and casualisation of workforce. The labour reforms that seem to be accompanying globalisation process seem to hurt the interests of workers at least in immediate sense. As part of conditions of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) signed at Maracas developing countries including India are being pressurised to keep the subsidies to farmers up to ten per cent of their value output. It has also introduced a patent regime. These developments have potential to affect Indian agriculture and the interest of the farmers in a fundamental sense. The process of globalisation also poses a major danger to environment because a mad race has started among governments to create proper investment climate. This many times means relaxing environment safety norms to reap economic benefits. Another important question is how does globalisation affect the interests of women?

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## 5.2 MEANING OF GLOBALISATION

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An important aspect of globalisation is state-led centralised and planned economic development being replaced with market led liberalised and globalised economic development. There seems to be disillusionment with the state and it is seen as source of all the evils and market is projected as panacea of all the economic evils. Dreze and Sen are of the view that expansion of market is among the instruments that can help to promote human capabilities, and given the need of eliminating endemic deprivation in India it would be irresponsible to ignore the opportunity. State seems to be on the retreat. Even in India the state-centric developmental approach has come in for sharp criticism. The central role assigned to state and its bureaucracy in developmental projects has precluded participation of masses and local people in solving their problems. The movement of international capital along with expansion of information technology have resulted in the erosion of the boundaries and sovereignty nation-states. This void caused by the retreating state necessitates a dialogue between globalisation and social movements. Social movements have succeeded in conveying a message clearly that any developmental paradigm not providing for their participation will not be acceptable to them. In India initial doubts and apprehensions about globalisation seem to have waned. There seems to be greater consensus in favour of globalisation today. According to Pranab Bardhan this consensus is inexorable and irreversible. An insulated, inward directed economy does not seem to be an option in today's time. In this situation a more plausible option seems to be shaping globalisation. Powerful social movements with coordination and networking among them at local, national and global levels can go a long way towards this objective.

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## 5.3 IMPACT OF GLOBALISATION

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Until the 1980s many of the developing countries pursued inward-oriented growth strategies, relied heavily on state-owned enterprises and had highly protected and regulated economies. Indian economy was not an exception to this general pattern. The 1990s saw these countries launched on the path of privatisation, liberalisation and deregulation. India was also one of these countries. A combination of factors both international and national influenced India's decision to follow what came to be known as the New Economic Policy. India was faced with severe depletion of foreign exchange reserve. There was not enough foreign exchange reserve even to pay for imports of two months. The country was left with no option but to approach the World Bank and IMF for loans to avert the crisis. To avail these loans the country had to agree to a package of Stabilisation and Structural Adjustment Programme. This package gave the much-needed boost to the process of economic liberalisation in India. This gave an opportunity to the reform-oriented bureaucracy inside the government to go ahead with their long cherished agenda. The impending financial collapse firmed up the resolve to reform at the governmental level. The ideological opposition to the policy of reforms appeared to be weakest around this time. The economic policy Margaret Thatcher in England and Ronald Regan in America represented what came to be known as rolling back the state. In a way this sounded the dwindling popularity of Keynesian economic model of welfare state. The decline of the socialist model in the form of disintegration of former Soviet Union and adoption of capitalist path of development by its successor states and its once

satellite states of eastern Europe made the ideological props to the ideology of pervasive state control ineffective. China's economic success story in the post-reform period also seems to have firmed up India's resolve to liberalise.

Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen are of the view that government policy at this time seems to be overwhelmingly concerned with removing counter-productive regulations. The state has been neglecting positive activities earlier also and continues to do so even now. Zoya Hasan is of the opinion that economic liberalisation may hurt the interest of the disprivileged in material sense; hence there is need of imaginative strategies to surmount the cleavages of deprivation and inequity between classes, castes, communities, genders and regions. There has been a lack of commitment on the part of the state to welfarist goals and insensitivity towards the condition of the marginalised. There is need of vigorous social movements to reorient and remind the social commitment of the state in the post-globalisation phase.

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## **5.4 GLOBALISATION, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

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In India social movements have played an important role both before and after independence. Globalisation seems to be throwing newer challenges before social movements. In the era of globalisation social movements all over the world have been active in ameliorating the conditions of people by launching movements against both democratic and undemocratic states. Some movements have taken advantage of the opportunities offered by globalisation for creating international networks. At the same time some movements have been busy fighting the negative effects of globalisation.

Charles Oman holds that the challenge before globalisation is that it should strengthen social cohesion not weaken it. This can happen if all segments of society within countries and internationally share the benefit and perceive to benefit, from the raising of productivity levels to which globalisation can contribute. But the problem is that the political economy of the world is managed by a small number of multilateral institutions mainly the trio of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organisation. The policies of these organisations are determined by the richest industrialised countries, which are the members of the Group of seven. Together these countries control over 60 per cent world economic output and over 75 per cent of world trade. The report of the South Commission in 1992 held that inequalities tended to widen, as the economy grew and became more industrialised. The gap of income, knowledge and power was growing and large segments of the population experienced no significant improvement in their standard of living. The economic management by the three organisations the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO has caused massive reorganisation in the economy and society in developing countries. Globalisation in a sense has meant narrowing of policy options for the countries of the South. This also seems to be undermining their sovereignty.

For the vast number of developing countries high growth economic activities propelled by globalisation pose serious threat to their environment and these activities may also lead to faster depletion of their resources. Globalisation has started a competition among the governments of the developing countries to create better investment climate. Many times this also means relaxing environmental safety guide-lines for attracting foreign



investment. It is obvious that environment safety norms are compromised in the name of higher economic growth. This kind of growth has led to exploitation of Chile's native old-growth forest, the massive expansion of shrimp aquaculture in Honduras with the destruction of mangrove ecosystem. It also led to extraction of minerals on the scale of Brazil's Cajaras scheme. All this exploitation of renewable and non-renewable resources has a common aim — generating export earning. In parts of India environmental pollution has reached disastrous proportion. Both the major rivers the Ganga and Yamuna have become polluted and the major cause of pollution is disposal of untreated industrial waste into these rivers. In places like Vapi, Ankleswar, Nandesari and Baroda in Gujarat the victims of pollution from factories and industries complain about holes in their clothes, death of buffaloes or elephants by drinking polluted water released in rivers, ponds or open spaces or farmers complain about crop destruction due to the pollution. The polluting industries refused to accept any responsibility. Latin America has become pollution haven for corporations and production units driven out of the USA, Canada and Western Europe because of stringent environment norms. Latin America's environmental crisis clearly demonstrates the logic of globalisation under the dominance of transnational capital with benefits ultimately reaped in the rich industrialised countries. There is greater need for social movements to direct their energy to counter trends towards global inequality, increasing vulnerability of the environment and livelihood in the South. At the global level the shape and nature of resistance is difficult to visualise. On the international level it is more difficult to communicate the need of environmental security. Most international NGOs are mainly concerned with issues of poverty and human rights at national and sub-national levels.

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## **5.5 GLOBALISATION AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA**

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### **5.5.1 Farmers**

Globalisation is likely to have serious implications for Indian agriculture. India signed the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade [GATT] at Maracas in 1994 and became part of the World Trade Organisation [WTO]. As part of the GATT agreement developing countries including India are under obligation to introduce reduction in subsidies and keep it to the 10 per cent of farmers' value output. But cutting down on subsidies does not seem to be practical because of strong resistance of the farmers' lobby. India together with other countries of the third world has accused the WTO of following discriminatory practices because the developed countries continue to give subsidies while they continue to pressurise the developing countries to cut subsidies. Another GATT-related problem affecting the interest of the farmers is introduction of patenting in agriculture. A farmer is not automatically permitted to use seeds of the protected varieties which he saved for sowing next crop. He has either to pay compensation for the use of the seeds saved by him or to obtain permission of the breeder. As most of the plant breeders are Multi-National Corporations and their main motive is profit the only option left with the farmers is to buy the seeds again. Farmers in Karnataka had registered their protest against this arrangement by attacking the farm of Car gill seeds, a Multi-National Seed Company. The farmers have been joined by the NGOs in their protest against the seed companies. Liberalising agricultural sector seems to be more contentious. A jump in food prices appears to be an inevitable outcome of liberalisation. This fear has a solid basis. The international prices of food grains are higher than domestic prices. Any rise



in food prices would hit the poor hardly. This would make the government of the day immensely unpopular and might seriously jeopardise the electoral fortunes of the ruling party. Overall the response of the Rich Farmers Movement towards the New Economic Policy and India joining the WTO has not been undifferentiated. Sharad Joshi an important leader of farmers in the western part of the country has welcomed the new development. He expects opportunities for farmers in the phase of liberalisation. At the same time Mahender Singh Tikait in the north and Nanjundaswamy in the south are apprehensive of negative fallouts of liberalisation on the agricultural sector. Economic reforms in agricultural sector have not met any serious protest because a section of rich farmers is finding new investment opportunities in agro-based industries like sugar, rice mills, food processing, floriculture and horticulture. In the 1990s India has increased its exports of both fresh and processed fruits and vegetables. As China has joined the WTO and is deepening its engagement with globalisation the biggest risk for India may be being left behind. It would mean losing out on opportunities offered by globalisation. Some people argue that the farmers' movements should not oppose globalisation. While it is always good to be watchful against negative fallouts of globalisation at the same time Indian farmers should ensure that they benefit from the opportunities offered by globalisation.

### **5.5.2 Working Classes**

Globalisation has thrown big challenges before the working class movement. An important part of the globalisation agenda has been privatisation of public sector units in India, which has meant disinvestments from, and privatisation of the public sector enterprises. Among the main planks of the New Economic Policy are closure of sick and loss making public enterprises. Workers have faced the prospect of retrenchment. There have been cases of Voluntary Retirement Schemes [VRS]. Casualisation and contractualisation of workers have been other accompaniments of globalisation. The practice of keeping contract and casual labour in place of regular employees has become widespread. Many people have argued that post-economic reform period has been a period of jobless growth. As part of Stabilisation and Structural Adjustment Programme number of vacancies have come down. There has been a marked decline in the growth rate of total employment in the organised sector in the 1990s as compared to 1980s. As part of the New Economic Policy the policy of downsizing has started. This means reducing overheads for cost reduction. Industrial Disputes Act 1947 lays reasonable restrictions on employers intending to undertake retrenchment or closure. This act stipulates that in case of retrenchment or closure due notice will have to be given to the union. In such situation the union and management have to devise ways and means to protect employment of the workers. It is obvious that labour laws regarding job security are being changed on the grounds of economic rationality. Downsizing in developed countries is less painful because of the fully developed social security system already in place. This unfortunately is not the case in developing countries like India. However, a National Renewal Fund was created to provide social safety net to the labour force rendered jobless as early as in 1992. Liberalisation has also meant relaxation in government control over the private sector as a result of which the bargaining power of labour vis-à-vis capital has come down. There have been strikes by trade unions to protect the interest of workers in State Electricity Boards, ITDC hotels, nationalised banks etc. The introduction of the New Economic Policy has exposed the weaknesses of the working class movement. The response to the anti-labour reform policies cannot

be effective because the trade unions are a divided house. Some scholars argue that working class movement should not be opposing privatisation and their focus should be protection of the interest of the workers. Ashutosh Varshney is of the view that it would be easier to launch bigger privatisation programmes, if it is decoupled from large- scale retrenchment.

### **5.5.3 Middle Classes**

On the job front the complete story is not so dismal because globalisation has also unfolded big opportunities for lots of people, particularly of the upper middle class. This is especially true about people having degrees from the famous IITs and IIMs who are in big demand both in India and the world over. The students from such premier institutions walk away with unheard of pay packets. India churns out more than 70000 computers professional every year in addition to the graduates from the IITs. The Indian software industry employed nearly 160000 professionals in 1998-99. Indian software industry has earned a worldwide reputation. This feat has been achieved by leveraging India's highly skilled technical manpower. India has emerged as a powerful player in the world in the IT sector. India's advance in the IT sector has attracted many American and European companies to locate their back office operations in Bangalore, Chennai, Pune, and Gurgaon etc. The shifting of back office operations of foreign companies has been influenced by many factors like abundant supply of cheap labour, cheap satellite communication and the facility of Internet. While this development has created tremendous job opportunities in India it has been used by foreign companies as a cost cutting arrangement. These back office operations range from billing to payroll handling, airline reservation to answering customer complains. In case of both these kinds of jobs whether in the much famed IT sector or the Call Centers students coming from upper middle class and urban background are more likely to get these jobs. The reservation policy of the government has been in keeping with the idea of social justice. This was found that without reservation people from the disadvantaged section were unable to get jobs. As of now the private companies and the Multi National Corporations do not follow any principle of reservation. Some representatives of disadvantaged sections look at liberalisation as a ploy to deny the disadvantaged strata of society the benefit of reservation. Many Dalit leaders like Ram Vilas Paswan and Social Justice Minister in the UPA government led by Man Mohan Singh, Meira Kumar have appealed for reservation even in the private sector. Some people argue that apart from demanding reservation also in private sector the movement of the disadvantaged section should exert pressure on the government to improve the quality of education in government-managed institutions. The people from the disadvantaged sections do not have the means to afford quality education offered at high prices in elite schools meant for the well-off sections of society. Thus the introduction of the new economic policy has marginalised a large section of the population, as they do not have the necessary skills to benefit from the opportunities offered by globalisation. To make the marginalised partners in the bounty offered by globalisation process there is need of big investment in imparting that kind of skills in them that they do not lag behind aspirants from privileged section of society. Dreze and Sen are of the view that there is great opportunity here for channeling political activism in the direction of forcefully demanding expansion of basic education, health care and social security for those who are left out of the system.

#### **5.5.4 Women**

Globalisation can be seen as an ideology committed to production for profit, which leads to relative or absolute deprivation of women, colonies and marginal groups and communities. The exigencies of competition and market are used to enforce policies, which aims at profit making at the expense of people and planet. Angela Miles is of the view that feminists all over the world have come to reject the profit-based market system which compels private ownership of all the earth's goods and recognises only those things as valuable which can be bought and sold for profit on the market. This market does not value the work of nature and women. Feminists in developed countries are fighting for recognition of the value of the goods and services produced by them in homes. They are also fighting for men's equal participation in such works. They also demand recognition of the value of the social support provided by women in the form of childcare, health and educational services. They are also struggling both in North and South to maintain traditional pattern and capacities of subsistence in the face of devastating development process. The phenomenon of globalisation its commitment to commercialisation, modernisation, export-oriented development, growing reliance on private sector and the obsession with profit motive has adversely affected the cause of women in India also. There has been a sharp fall in women's employment in the organised sector in the era of globalisation. The expansion of informal sector has put women in the category of reserved army. They have joined the rank of poor. This increasing feminisation of poverty is a matter of grave concern. Even in today's India patriarchal norms established nearly two thousand years ago continue to prevail. The media and the education system continue to project the ideals of motherhood and loyal and faithful wife. The subordinate position of women in society is reinforced by a look at declining sex ratio of girls, growing domestic violence of all kinds against women, the spurt in dowry deaths and rising rape cases. Derez and Sen hold that the persistence of sharp gender inequalities in many different forms is one of the most striking aspects of the Indian economy and it yields disparities in power, decision-making and well-being. They are of the view that subordination of women in Indian society tends to impair their effectiveness in reducing deprivation in general. Woman's emancipation in the form of basic education and economic independence can have many positive impacts. Kerala is a shining example in this regard. There women's emancipation has a direct impact on childcare and a noticeable check on fertility rate. The suppression of women from participation in social, political and economic life hurts the society as a whole, not just women. Women have often been active in demanding and working for basic social change. Social movements in general and women's movement in particular should exert enough pressure on government so that proper policies for women's emancipation should be made and also implemented.

#### **5.5.5 Networking and Cooperation**

Most of the social movements are generally preoccupied with their on particular struggle. They are gripped with the mindsets of "our movement" and "their movement". This exclusiveness makes them vulnerable in the event of oppression unleashed by state. With networking and coordination among them these social movements can play important role in achieving democratic social transformation. The need of networking and coordination is not limited to social movements within a country. Environment Movements and anti-WTO movements have demonstrated global networking and

coordination. Aaron Pollack is of the view that social movements are increasingly going global in their response to the neoliberal economics. The programmes and policies which have impact on lives of people are not exclusively in the hands of national governments. Many times programmes and policies are direct consequence of the decisions taken by global actors. This necessitates networking and coordination among social movements on global level to bargain for a better deal. The communication revolution that has accompanied globalisation has created a situation in which any form of movement in any part of the globe can easily attract the attention of global community. This can very well create public opinion in favour or against some issues.

Rodrik in his book *Has Globalisation Gone Too Far?* (1997) argues that economic globalisation catalyses social protest in three ways. First, unskilled workers in the developed countries perceive a decline in their bargaining power as a result of greater capital mobility and feared increase in the elasticity of demand for domestic labour. Workers fear that capital has a decreased incentive to maintain the post-world War II bargain, in which capital provided workers with a stable living wage in exchange for the promise of labour peace. Accordingly, unskilled workers protest globalisation as they now face increased uncertainty about wage cuts, instability in labour markets, and lower benefits. Second, opposition can arise as globalisation eclipses domestic norms. Most countries uphold distinct norms about labour market standards and acceptable market practices. When world markets are highly protected, these normative differences are juxtaposed but rarely come into conflict with one another. With greater international economic integration, however, these normative differences clash directly and place in sharp relief distinct and conflicting beliefs about state responsibilities vis-à-vis citizens. Where greater economic integration takes place at the expense of national legal norms, globalisation processes can and do endanger political opposition. It also triggered off anti-child labour movements. Third, opposition arises as workers blame globalisation for dismantling the welfare state. International institutions pressures to whittle away at social programmes and arrangements that protected certain categories of workers in the past from unstable, unpredictable, and more open markets.

In India because of globalisation industrial growth has increased which provide employment in informal sector. Hence workers get fragmented and compete among each other for security and job. It adversely affect organised struggles. What we have is localised working class movements.

Because of the increased international network of activists for Human Rights, transnational collective action has increased. International pressure against Gujarat communal violence and support to the Narmada Bachao Andolan are some of the most important examples.

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## 5.6 SUMMARY

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To sum, it can be said that rolling back globalisation does not seem to be a plausible option because an overwhelming consensus exists today in its favour both among political parties and intellectuals. Globalisation seems to be perpetuating old inequalities and also creating new kind of inequalities. That is why there is a need for what has been called shaping globalisation. The wealth and opportunities which are created should benefit every section of society. The state policies should aim at imparting education and other technical skills to the disadvantaged sections like dalits and women. This can help them

to develop a sense of partnership in progress. There is a greater need of powerful social movements in present context more particularly because state appears to be on the retreat. There is also a need of coordination and networking among social movements both on national and global levels to ensure sustainable and equitable development. It is also necessary to ensure that development does not take place at the cost of rights and freedom of the people.

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## **5.7 EXERCISES**

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- 1) Identify the main features of globalisation.
- 2) Discuss the impact of globalisation on various sections of Indian society.
- 3) How do you relate the social movements to the impact of globalisation?

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## UNIT 6 STATE, MARKET AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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### Structure

- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Changing Status of the Indian State
  - 6.2.1 State in the Post-Independence Period
  - 6.2.2 Discourse on the Indian State
- 6.3 Changing Status of the Market
- 6.4 State and Market in the New Context
- 6.5 Contextualising State, Market and Social Movements
- 6.6 Summary
- 6.7 Exercises

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### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

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You will study in different units of this course, collective actions or the social movements of various groups — agrarian classes, working class, women, dalits, OBCs, environmental and ecological groups, etc., have become more prominent in India, especially since the last three decades of the twentieth century, though such movements had occurred earlier also. With changes in the society and economy of India the number of social groups taking recourse to collective action increases. Their emergence has coincided with the latest phase of the globalisation, changing statuses of the state and market. These developments have given rise to debate in the academic and political discourse about the relationships between state, market and social movements. These also have generated a debate about the changes in the nature and roles of the state and market. The debate raises some questions. Has the nature of social movements changed or is changing with the expansion of market? What kinds of new social movements are emerging? Has the state become weak and withdrawn from its responsibility for social transformation? Do the market forces dominate and govern the state? Are social classes getting fragmented and loose in their capacity to organise and dominate? Has class base of the social movements declined with the rise of market? etc. This unit seeks to explain relationship among the state, market and social movements.

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### 6.2 CHANGING STATUS OF THE INDIAN STATE

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#### 6.2.1 State in the Post-Independence Period

The trajectory of state in India during post-Independence period can be divided in two phases for the purpose of understanding its relationship to the market and social movements. These are — pre-1990s and post-1990; the phase preceding the present form of liberalisation and the phase coinciding with it. Such demarcation is helpful in comprehending the relationship among them especially because the issue about the relative weakness, strength, relevance or irrelevance of state and market has become more spectacular with the herald of the new phase of liberalisation, i.e., since the 1970s. The pre-1990s phase can further be sub-divided into the era of dominance or autonomy of the state, identified with the Nehru-Mahalanobis model of development of the 1950s and mid-1960s and the phase between late 1960s and 1980s.



During the first two decades following Independence, the state was given a dominant place in the development model. The national and international circumstances which prevailed at that time necessitated to accord such a position to the state. The division of the country into India and Pakistan, the consequent communal riots, influx of refugees after partitions, merger of 565 princely states into the Indian Union, the division of the world in two ideologically opposite blocks — the American and Russian known to be involved in the cold war were the conditions which motivated the national leadership to adopt a development model in which the state would find a dominant place. Founded at the initiative of the then Prime-Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and P.C. Mahalanobis a development economist, this model which gave prominence to the state was known as Nehru-Mahalanobis model of development. It sought to build India a strong “nation-state”, showing the unity of diverse regional, economic, cultural and regional groups. The market was supposed to depend on the state for its existence; it had to be regulated and get the permission of the state through licenses. It gave prominence to the state organs, especially bureaucracy, which came to known as the “permanent government” or “steel frame”, state planning, mixed economy, non-alignment in the international relations.

This model envisaged that it would lead to overall development of the country, eliminate the differences and hierarchy based on social cleavages — caste, religion, language, race, region, and economic disparity (will augment the economic growth, remove poverty, etc.). In the macro economy it gave preference to the industry over the agriculture or the rural sector. However, the state introduced several measures which affected different classes and groups; these groups participated in the collective actions in the coming decades. In the rural areas land reforms — abolition of landlordism and making the tillers as owners of land, agricultural extension schemes, community development programmes and several welfare measures were introduced by the state in different states. Though these schemes were not completely successful, these had improved the conditions of peasantry to varying degrees. The most forceful and effective intervention of the state in the rural economy was in the 1960s through the green revolution the HVY (High Yielding Varieties of seeds), fertilizers and inputs, seeds, mechanisation, etc. in the selected areas of the country.

The period from the late 1960s till the 1980s saw the deinstitutionalisation and personalisation of the state machinery, specially during the reign of Indira Gandhi. With some interruption, this phase continued till the 1980s. This included period of emergency, more than four years’ rule at the centre by different non-Congress political formations — the Janata Party, the Janata Dal government and the governments headed by Charan Singh and Chandra Shekhar. The decline of the state institutions which started during the Prime Minister ship Indira Gandhi continued even during the later regimes.

The post 1990 phase, i.e., the era of liberalisation from the 1990s, has seen the decline in the state authority following the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme introduced by the Narasingha Rao government in 1991. This phase is marked by the parallel rise of the market force, civil society organisations which have eroded the monopoly of the state.

### **6.2.2 Discourse on the Indian State**

Two perspectives have been followed to analyse the Indian state — its nature, autonomy and efficacy. These are Marxian and the non-Marxian. The latter can further be

sub-divided into development/modernisation/systemic and neo-liberal perspectives. The Marxian perspective is followed by academicians and different communist parties. The Non-Marxian scholars include the developmentalist/Modernists/Behaviouralists like Rajni Kothari and Morris Jones, L.I. Rudolph and S.H Rudolph and neo-liberals like P.N. Bhagwati, Srinivasn, Padma Desai, V K Ramaswami and B R Shenoy. Developmentalists use political system in place of the state. However, in his later writings, Rajni Kothari used state, not political system. While the Marxists consider the Indian state as a representative of the propertied classes (landlords, bourgeoisie /feudal classes and foreign multi-nationals), the neo-liberals find it inefficient. The emphasis of the Marxists is to understand its class character. The neo-liberals find the state inefficient, bureaucratic/rule-oriented detrimental to the growth and progress in the pre-1991 phase (the present phase of liberalisation). Their critique of the Indian state focuses on its two features — development planning and state intervention. According to the neo-liberal critics of the state, Indian state during its existence in the post-Independence period has not been able to achieve the growth nor has been able to remove the poverty. The pre-liberalisation phase (pre-1991) was considered by the neo-liberal like Bhagwati as the phase of ‘slow rates of growth and per capita income’ and as phase of ‘weak performance’ regarding India’s ‘own aspirations’. The neo-liberals rated India’s performance inferior to the performance of the East Asian countries. They argued that India’s performance improved in the post-liberalisation era in relation to the earlier phase. It is because of the prominent role which the market has come to play and decline in the dominance of the state. However, some of them believe that state intervention has been successful in transforming traditional agriculture. But there has been stagnation in India’s industry during the 1960s and 1970s. The Marxist scholars find the neo-liberal critique of planning, state intervention and state’s dismal performance in the pre-liberalisation era unconvincing. They refute the arguments of the neo-liberals on all accounts. The representatives of the Marxian perspective are T. J. Byres, Prabhat Patnaik and Amiya Kumar Bagchi. Deepak Nayyar argues that contrary to the argument of neo-liberals like Bhagwati, there was revival of industry before the liberalisation phase, i.e., the late 1970s and 1980s. The Marxists, however, have their own arguments to criticise the planned economy and the Nehru-Mahalanobis model. Unlike the neo-liberals, they do not overlook the contribution of the planning and state intervention; they do not dismiss “*tout court*” the planning and interventionist state as responsible for “an unmitigated economic disaster” They argue that liberalisation has not brought down poverty; rather it has increased it. T. J. Byres, unlike the neo-liberals who do not see improvement in the economic conditions of the people in the pre-1991 era, holds that there was a period of which saw economic growth and removal of the incidents of poverty — i.e. mid-1970s and the 1980s. The development planning is still considered relevant by them in the phase of liberalisation.

Though broadly following the non-Marxian perspective, L. I. Rudolph and S. H. Rudolph in their book *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* situate the Indian state in the context of politics in India. They argue that the politics in India is not a class politics; it is centrist politics. The state stands as a third factor between the private capital and organised labour. As the organised labour form very small proportion of the labour population in comparison to the unorganised labour, the class politics in India is absent. It is centrist politics. As a third factor, state negotiates between labour and capital as an autonomous body. Rudolph and Rudolph also indicate the Indian state as a “socialist state” invoked “socialism” in pursuit of public sector and state planning. Byres terms it as “empty political rhetoric”. According to Rudolph and Rudolph the

state is related to two types of politics — demand politics and command politics. The demand groups need leadership, ideology and articulation of collective good in order to enter into collective action. These collective actions are social movements. In command politics the state as a third actor “not only provides order, justice, and security, enhances social goods and benefits, and reduces and eliminates social costs, but also directly commands enough resources to be self-determining in variety of policy arenas and historical contexts”.

The scholars who followed development/modernisation perspective did not use the concept of state to study the polity of countries, especially decolonised/developing/third world countries. They sought to understand the institutions and processes of the political system. The main argument of these scholars was that different constituents of the political system conflict and adjust with each other and in the process the system remains resilient and maintains itself. This framework has been criticised for confining politics to the political elite and thus neglecting the ordinary people. Besides, it did not attempt to link politics to its historical legacy and imperialist forces. However, by the 1970s, the need to study state was felt with Theda Skocpol’s “Bringing the state back in”. Even Rajni Kothari used state in his later writings, most important being the *State Against the People*.

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### 6.3 CHANGING STATUS OF THE MARKET

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As you have read in the previous section, the market was given secondary position in the policy formulations in relation to the state in the pre-liberalisation phase. The market not only had to depend on the state leadership and bureaucracy for clearance, licenses or operate under the inspector raj, it also had no major role in measures meant for various sections of the society. Besides, the market had to face the corruption/lack of transparency, redtapism, etc. These were in general taken to be failure of the state. This brought to the prominence the role of the state in the process of democratisation, governance and development. A search for an alternative to the state as an agency for carrying out development and democracy started. A section of scholars and politicians argued that the alternative to the state could be found in the market. But there was an equal strident opposition to the market as an alternative.

This was a general trend world over. The western world with the neo-liberal ideology and through the institutions like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, etc., played a leading role to propagate the ideas that the panaceas to the problems of the third world could be found if the state in these countries “rolled back” or became a minimalist state and structural reforms were introduced in these countries. It boosted the market which is associated with the economic reforms programme, popularly known as the globalisation or the Structural Adjustment Programme. This has been true for the third world countries. These countries have been beset with the colossal problems in all respects and faced “crisis of governance” — violence, corruption, lack of transparency, and financial instability and insecurity. In case of India, by the 1980s the financial problems, mainly the balance of payment had become very acute. The solution to this was to be found in borrowing from the international donor agencies. But they could lend only if their conditions were accepted. As a result of this conditionality, government of India had to introduce the Structural Adjustment Programme which came to be known as — liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation. In India the present phase of

globalisation or encouragement to the market started by the government led by P.V. Narasingha Rao in 1991. Despite opposition to the encouragement to the market — globalisation, different governments in India both at the centre and in the states have been pursuing globalisation since then. Some scholars, however, argue that globalisation had started much earlier to its present phase; it is not a new phenomenon. If the immediate cause to encourage market through the Structural Adjustment Programme in India in 1991 by the donor agencies under their conditionality was the balance of payment crisis, in the case of Sub-Saharan Africa it was “crisis of governance” in 1989. It was indicated by the lack transparency, accountability; by the inefficiency of the state and corruption,

The structural reforms in a sense became euphemism for the market. The indicators of this were: removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers within and outside the country; creation of the free economic/trade zones; dismantling the license system or the inspector raj; encouraging the private capital and discouraging the state/public capital or public sector units (disinvestments); allowing foreign capital or the multinational companies to invest in India and start their business operations here (allowing the FDI in different sectors of the economy). The market is also accorded priority in welfare sectors like education, health and setting up the infrastructure, etc. While some argue in favour of the dominant role for the market, others argue that the market has to operate in collaboration with the state and civil society organisations. Notwithstanding the differences among the supporters of the market forces, they all share the common understanding to accord principal place to the market. The market is supposed to be part of the second “green revolution” — corporatisation of agriculture, contract farming, diversification of agriculture, changing cropping pattern in order to produce more profitable crops/ mono crop cultivation, etc., In the service sector the impact of market could be visible in the policies about the reduction of jobs in the public institutions, voluntary retirement schemes and contractual employment, etc.

Like in the case of the success, failure and nature of the state, the reaction to the market is also divided. If there are supporters of the market forces, there are also opponents of it. The latter include diverse forces — the leftists intellectuals and organisations, *swedeshi* (opposed to the foreign markets), and section of dalit spokespersons, a section of environmentalists, etc. (as you will study in different units).

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## 6.4 STATE AND MARKET IN THE NEW CONTEXT

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The changes in the statuses of the state and the market have occurred in a new context. The features of this context are: decline of the cold war and disintegration of the socialist block in the 1980s and rise of civil society organisations, intellectuals, NGOs and Voluntary organisations. These developments resulted in the erosion of the monopoly of the state as the principal agency of working for the welfare of the society. Apart from the market, the new agencies in terms of civil society came to be acknowledged as the potential agencies of welfare of the people. While the questions about the efficacy of the state and market whether one is more important than the other, continue to be debated, the significance of the civil society organisations has become enormous throughout the world. The questions whether the NGOs alone can deliver the goods to people or they have to do so in collaboration with state and market are being raised.

The growing significance of the civil society, existing along with the state and market, working either independently of or in collaboration with them, has become one of the principal focus of academic discourse and political activism. Along with civil society, the concept like the social capital have also come to occupy important place in the academic discourse. Popularised by Robert Putnam while studying the civic traditions in Italy, the social capital is supposed to consist of networking, trust and shared values among the members of a group which possess social capital. Social capital denotes existence of associations among its members. As social movements are collective actions — with the organisations, leaderships, organisations, ideology, policies and strategies of mobilisation, associations have become important part of social movements. However, the civil society organisations and concept of social capital have not gone unchallenged. John Harriss argues that social capital depoliticises development. Existence of civil society, social capital and social movements are considered to be indicative of the existence of democracy in a section of the contemporary discourse.

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## **6.5 CONTEXTUALISING STATE, MARKET AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

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Are the social movements related to the changing statuses of the state and market or globalisation? Like on the statuses of the state and market, there are also opposite opinions on the relationship between the globalisation and social movements. Some argue that the social movements, especially the new social movements along with the rise of identity movements have emerged as result of globalisations. But when you read different units of this course you will find that there have been collective actions of different groups even before the present phase of globalisation was introduced in India in the 1990s. Therefore, it is not always possible to relate the social movements to the globalisation. But if we place the issues and collective actions of various groups in the context of changes in the political economy including the globalisations, it can help us to understand the social movement better. We can contextualise the social movements with some examples.

The relationship of the social movements with the state and market can at best be seen in the following way: the state's ability to meet the aspirations of the people and their representation in the state agencies or organs, and with the market also its ability to give the people what the state has been unable to do. As you have read in different units, different sections of people started questioning the model of development and nation-state building within a few years of implementation of the Constitution. There were movements on the ethnic, linguistic, caste and class issues. The personalisation of the state institutions by the political executive along with the growing corruption resulted in the Nav Nirman movement in Gujarat and JP movement known as Total Revolution. But unlike the latter decades, the mobilisation of these movements was done by the political parties, mainly the opposition or the non-Congress parties.

While the mobilisation up to the 1960s had been done mainly by the political parties or the organisations related to them, since the 1970s the different social groups came to be mobilised by the non-party or apolitical organisations, though in the due course of time they became political. Gail Omvedt terms such movements as the new social movements as they share some characteristics which are new. The issues raised by these movements are related both to the state and market. They are related to the state as the



state has been held responsible for neglecting them and thus forcing them to launch social movements. They are related to the market because of nature of their demands. The market-related demands are: the remunerative prices of the produce of the farmers, availability of the subsidised inputs. Some scholars like Tom Brass argue that there is nothing new in these demands; they were raised earlier also. The intervention of the market forces, especially the multinational organisations to appropriate the natural resources like water by the soft drink making companies has caused the movements of farmers in Kerala and Rajasthan against the usage of the ground water. Retrenchment of workers in several public sector undertakings, following their privatisation or closure, increase in the FDI in the Insurance and Telecom Companies has caused resentment in the working classes and the government employees. These, however, have not resulted in the sustained collective action.

From the 1990s onwards the issue of reservation in the private sector has also been added to the agenda of dalit leaders and political organisations. They apprehend that privatisation as a part of the globalisation will result in the reduction of the government jobs. This will harm the cause of social justice. They argue that in the light of the shrinkage of government jobs following the privatisation, reservation should be provided to dalits in the private sector. This demand is, however, resented by the representatives of the market or the industrialists. But again, this issue has not resulted in a sustained collective action of dalits. It is being raised in the pamphlets, press statements or the party manifestoes.

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## 6.6 SUMMARY

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To sum up, the relationships among the state, market and social movements are among the much debated issues in the academic discourse. But there are two different and contradictory views about all of them. While one group of scholars attributes the reasons of the social movements directly to the decline of the state and rise of the market, another gives just opposite views about it. Similarly about the changing statuses of the state and market and their roles in fulfilling their tasks, there are opposite opinions. In such a situation, we can have a proper understanding of the social movements, if we situate them in the context of changing statuses of the market and the state, even if we do not relate the causes of their rise directly to the market and state.

The dominant or autonomous position which the state was accorded according to the Nehru-Mahalanobis model, its nature, status and performance has been analysed by the scholars. The Marxist among them consider the Indian state to be a representative of the propertied classes – the landlords/feudal elements, bourgeoisie/capitalists and the foreign capital. But at the same time they appreciate positive contribution of the state including its planning. There are on the other hand those, known as neo-liberals who find the Indian state failing on all accounts – achieving the growth rate and removing poverty. Though they are critical of Indian state through out its existence in the post-Independence period, their attack on it became more virulent in the new phase of liberalisation, i.e., since the last decade of the twentieth century. They argue that market had been accorded a secondary position in India in comparison to the state. The latter had suffered due to Inspector-License Raj, corruption, red tapism. The problems of the society can be solved if the market is encouraged to grow over the state. Their suggestions to encourage



market include: disinvestment of the public sector units to encourage the private or market forces; contractual jobs, voluntary retirement schemes, foreign direct investment in various sectors of economy; dominant role to the market in the state-market-civil society relationship, etc. The neo-liberals have also been criticised in various quarters, which include Marxists as well as non-Marxist for their neglect of the role of the state and giving priority to the market. In their opinion, the market whose sole motive is to earn profit can not be expected to introduce measures meant of the welfare of the people.

L.I. Rudolph and S. H. Rudolph recognise the autonomy of the state as a “third factor” between the capital and organised labour in politics of India which is centrist, not class politics.

There have been collective actions in India before and after independence. Their relationships to the state and market can be seen in the context of their changing statuses. Within a few years of the introduction of Indian constitution, there were collective actions of different groups which challenged the Indian state. Since the 1970s onwards, there has been addition to these movements in terms of more social groups, issues, leadership, ideologies and patterns and strategies of mobilisation. Though these movement might not have been caused directly due to the action of the state and market, their changing nature and statuses do provide a context to comprehend the social movements.

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## **6.7 EXERCISES**

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- 1) Discuss the changing status of state in India.
- 2) Discuss the changing status of the market and analyse its relationship to the state in India.
- 3) How do you relate state, market and social movements to each other? Explain.

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## UNIT 7 DALIT MOVEMENT

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### Structure

- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Who are Dalits?
- 7.3 Political Mobilisation of the Dalits
  - 7.3.1 Pre-independence Period
  - 7.3.2 Post-independence Period
- 7.4 Bahujan Samaj Party and the Dalits
  - 7.4.1 Ideology
  - 7.4.2 Limitations of the BSP
- 7.5 Summary
- 7.6 Exercises

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### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

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In recent years there has been a growth of academic interest in dalit mobilisation and movements in India. This is mainly due to the fact that there has been greater mobilisation and political participation of dalits in the electoral process in the country as a whole. It is primarily the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) which in fact is responsible for the mobilisation of the dalits and the democratic upsurge revolving around the dalits in the country. This unit focuses on dalit mobilisation, assertion and movement in the contemporary India. It deals with the meaning of dalits, their mobilisation in the pre and post-independence period. It also discusses the ideology of BJP and its mobilisation of dalits.

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### 7.2 WHO ARE DALITS?

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In the beginning let us turn to the question, who are the dalits? What is their condition in the society? The term 'dalit' is a Marathi word and literally means 'ground' or 'broken to pieces' and it was first popularised by the Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra by which they meant the Scheduled Caste population. Later on there had been attempts to broaden this definition to any oppressed group (Chandra, 2004). Dalits generally refer to the Scheduled Castes alone, the castes that in the Hindu Varna system were outside the Varna system and were known as Avarnas or Ati-shudras. They were considered as impure and untouchables and were placed in the caste hierarchy which perpetuated inequality. There are even some people who include the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, the Other Backward Classes and even other converted minorities into this category. For our present purpose we shall, however, refer to the SCs alone and not the other categories. The Dalits constitute around 15 per cent of the Indian population and belong to the lower rungs of the Indian society, economically and socially. According to the 1991 census their number was 138 million persons i.e., around 15.8 percent of the Indian population. According to the 2001 census they constitute more than 1,666 lakhs and around 16.2 per cent of the entire population. They are spread throughout the country though they are concentrated more in some states like Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Bihar, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa and Maharashtra.

Their population is spread throughout the parliamentary and assembly constituencies but in the country as a whole it constitutes around one third of the electorate (Chandra, 2004).

The Dalits not only belong to the lower caste category but also belong to the lower class category of the Indian society. They are mainly poor peasants, share-croppers and agricultural labourers in the rural economy. In the urban economy they basically form the bulk of the labouring population. Studies show that the condition of the Dalits in the country as a whole has not changed significantly over the years (Mendelsohn and Vicziany, 1998) even though the state in India had pursued pro-poor policies aimed at ameliorating the condition of the poor among whom the Dalits constitute a large chunk. Mendelsohn and Vicziany argue that the “post-independence regime has failed to bring about a systematic redistribution of resources in favour of those at the bottom of society, and it has also failed to pursue a consistent, albeit non radical, strategy of supplying ‘basic needs’ (health education and simple welfare) to the poor”.

As a result of the policy of protective discrimination an elite (mainly middle class) has emerged among dalits and it is these elite who have been the main beneficiaries of the state policies. As D L Sheth has noted that the middle class that comprised essentially of the upper castes now includes a small section of the lower castes or dalits (Sheth, 2002). As a result of these changes the entire dalit population may now be divided roughly into two sections; a section of dalits who have remained as they were earlier and a small, a narrow section who are relatively better off than the majority of the dalit population. This, however, may be considered as a positive change since it is this section (the middle class) among the Dalits who are primarily responsible for their mobilisation and assertion in contemporary India. Another change may also be noted and that is blatant form of caste discrimination which was practised for centuries is not practised in India today.

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## **7.3 POLITICAL MOBILISATION OF THE DALITS**

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### **7.3.1 Pre-Independence Period**

At the All India level Ambedkar initiated the articulation of dalit interest for the first time in the 1920s. Prior to Ambedkar there had been attempts to bring about reforms in their condition in some of the Indian states, for example, Phule in Maharashtra. But it was an attempt towards reform rather than towards the mobilisation of the dalits for political objectives. Ambedkar is known to have developed differences with Congress on several important questions relating to dalit issues and more or less remained the only spokesperson and the pre eminent advocate of the dalits from 1919, for more than three and half decades in the pre-independence period. Though the Congress talked about the necessity of removing untouchability, yet it did not articulate any concrete demand or programme to protect the interests of the depressed classes till 1917 (Shah, 2001). In contrast, mobilisation by Phule and Ambedkar in 1930s was firmly based on the belief that unless the caste system is destroyed the social evil of untouchability cannot end and that it is possible only if dalits acquire power. Hence in 1942 he formed the All India Scheduled Caste Federation (AISCF). Earlier he formed several organisations, the most important being the Indian Labour Party (ILP). The ILP was an organisation of a different kind in the sense that it aimed and attempted to mobilise a

broader section of the Indian society and not exclusively the dalits. He sought to use this organisation to appeal to wider audience including the industrial workers and the agricultural labourers. Duncan argues that he formed the ILP probably because he was convinced that a wider support base than the Scheduled Caste was essential and hence he embarked on a more class like strategy (Duncan, 2000).

### **7.3.2 Post-Independence Period**

The formation of the AISC was a very significant development in the history of dalit mobilisation in the country though it was not much successful and suffered defeat in the elections of 1946 and again in 1951. These reversals convinced Ambedkar that a separate political party was required which will have a wider electoral strategy. After his death in 1956, the AISC was dissolved and the Republican Party of India (RPI) was formed in 1957. The party, the first of its kind accepted the fundamental provisions of the Constitution and vowed to pursue its objective through the medium of parliamentary democracy. It functioned for almost two decades and was successful in establishing its base in the state of Maharashtra and to a limited extent in the state of Uttar Pradesh, though it is in the latter the RPI succeeded more in electoral terms than in Maharashtra. The RPI was also able to launch some major agitations for example, the agitations for land distribution in 1959 and 1964-65. These agitations, however, were more of an aberration rather than a general feature of RPI politics; they were, in fact, isolated episodes and not 'harbingers of sustained mass movements' (Duncan, 2000). The sporadic nature of RPI politics was probably the main reason why the RPI could not keep its base intact and always had to confront the problem of losing its support base as soon as the agitations ended.

By the mid 1960s it had established itself in the state of Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. These were the states in which it had a strong presence. Very soon, however, the RPI weakened largely because of internal differences on the issue of aligning with the Congress. A section of the leadership within the party was pragmatic and was interested in joining hands with the Congress whereas others were of the view that an alliance with the Congress would lead to a dilution of the greater objective of the party of promoting solidarity of the SC population in the country. On this issue some of the leaders broke away from the party and joined the Congress. It broke into several factions and today the various factions only play a marginal role in the politics of Maharashtra.

The failure of the RPI to keep up to the lofty ideals of Ambedkar and to fulfil the aspirations of the dalit youths led to the formation of the Dalit Panthers in Bombay in 1972. The Dalit Panthers drew its inspiration from the writings of Ambedkar and Marx. Its leaders criticised the RPI leaders for having failed to keep up to the ideals of Ambedkar and for its persistent splits and electoral failures. They sought to project themselves as an alternative to the RPI and very soon were successful in attracting the Dalit youths and students. Though initially it tasted success in the state of Maharashtra, yet very soon the movement (organisation) fell prey to the same problems that had confronted the RPI. Due to internal conflicts among leaders on several issues, the movement collapsed in a few years after its inception.

Why is it so that dalit political parties including the association formed by Ambedkar could not succeed or could succeed only partially in their political objectives? There are numerous reasons behind these. Duncan (2000) has noted three problems with these

associations. Firstly, the parties/association to him always 'relied on the support of particular caste groups rather than on the Dalits as a whole'. The organisations mainly relied on the Mahars in Maharashtra and the Chamars (Jatavs) in northern India, particularly in Uttar Pradesh. It is these castes that formed the backbone of the associations. As a result the other dalit castes felt neglected and suspected these parties as a party of that caste group and not theirs. Secondly, according to Duncan one of the issues for the organisation was the issue of whether to support other political parties as a part of their strategy during the elections or not? Ambedkar had left no clear directives in this regard. In the absence of a clear guidance from Ambedkar, the party leaders were caught up in ideological and strategic struggles. Some were in favour of supporting the Congress and other parties, whenever the need arose, whereas others felt that supporting the Congress will lead to dilution of the aim and objectives of the party. On this question alone many of the parties including the RPI split and this weakened the movement in the country as a whole. Thirdly, these political parties did not develop any modern organisational structure which could be geared up or could be used for the purpose of diffusing inner party struggles and help achieve cohesion. All these hastened the decline of the Ambedkarite parties including those formed by Ambedkar. Another cause of decline may be added. The Ambedkarite parties were unable to cut into the vote banks or support base of the Congress party, which was really an overwhelming phenomenon. Since Congress was a political party of all sections of the Indian population the lower caste population did feel comfortable with the programmes and policies of the RPI. The welfare policies of the Congress appealed to the dalits in the country in general and in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra in particular. The expansion of the dalit parties in recent years has taken place only after the Congress had declined considerably and has created a vacuum for other political forces in the country. Hence, it is not surprising that the BSP has grown in a state (Uttar Pradesh) where the decline of the Congress has been more rapid and complete than in any other state in India.

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## **7.4 THE BAHUJAN SAMAJ PARTY AND THE DALITS**

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The formation of the BSP by Kanshi Ram in 1984 marks a new beginning in the history of dalit mobilisation and politics in the country. One of the significant features of the BSP happens to be the fact that it had succeeded at least partially (particularly in North India) where Ambedkar and Ambedkarites failed in their objective in the country in more than fifty years. The BSP succeeded at a time in north India when the dalit parties in western India were under disarray. The BSP after its formation has not only succeeded in establishing a stronghold in some states in northern India but it has also been able to form governments along with its pre or post electoral allies in the critically important state of Uttar Pradesh. Though the governments were short lived, yet these are remarkable events since it has important implications for the dalits not only in the state of Uttar Pradesh but throughout the country.

Gail Omvedt has termed the formation of this party as deliberate. It has its root in a government employee's federation called the BAMCEF i.e., Backward and Minority Central Government Employees Federation, which was formed in 1978 by Kanshi Ram in Punjab but later on extended to Uttar Pradesh. Initially the BAMCEF supported the activities of the RPI in Maharashtra and sought the support of all the SCs and politicians from other parties (Chandra, 2004). Its primary aim, however, was to organise the elite section of the dalits who had benefited from the policies of reservation of the Government

of India. The formation of this organisation was critical because it is this organisation that provided the initial organisational and financial base for the BSP. Kanshi Ram tried to argue and mobilise dalits on the grounds that the further advance of the community could only take place if the whole community stood in a group. He was successful in this effort considering that within a span of more than a decade in the early 1990s the BAMCEF had a membership of around of 2 lakhs (Hassan, 2000).

The most important decision that was taken in the course of the formation of the BSP was the formation of Dalit Shoshit Sangharsh Samaj Samiti commonly known as the DS4 in 1981. The formation of this organisation was of critical importance considering that it is through this organisation Kanshi Ram tried to increase his influence among other sections of the society, which were hitherto not touched by the BAMCEF. The DS4, in fact, served as the organisational base for the formation of the BSP and took up political issues. It did so in two significant ways. One was through ideological campaigns that it carried with its mouthpiece "The Oppressed Indian" and secondly through the organisation of meetings, rallies mainly bicycle rallies and social action programmes throughout the country. Through the first it sought to 'educate, organise and agitate' the oppressed groups and through the second it sought to restore self-respect and equality for the oppressed castes in the society (Singh, 2002). The activities of the DS4 were prominent and frequent in 1983 and 1984, i.e., just before the formation of the BSP. Hence, it is clear that the DS4 was the precursor to the formation of the BSP by Kanshi Ram and in this sense the formation of the BSP was a calculated and deliberate one. It appears that it is through the DS4 Kanshi Ram sought to do the necessary spadework before the formation of the BSP.

Having set the stage and the ground Kanshi Ram inaugurated the BSP on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April 1984. He acquired a useful partner when he persuaded Mayawati to join the party in Uttar Pradesh. The joining of Mayawati in Uttar Pradesh became crucial for BSP because with this the party was able to get a solid leader in the state. Mayawati belong to a Chamar family and studied in Meerut and Delhi Universities and was in the teaching profession. She left her job to become a full time politician. Her family was in fact associated with the RPI for some time in Uttar Pradesh.

Kanshi Ram, it is said, deliberately tried to construct a new ethnic category, the Bahujan which included the SCs, STs, OBCs and the converted minorities (Chandra, 2004). This he did deliberately keeping in mind that the SCs alone cannot give him the much needed power because of their number which is around 15 per cent of the population and one third of the total electorate in the country. With a careful appeal to the ex-untouchables and with the appealing slogans of *Brahmin, Bania, Thakur Chor Baki Sab DS4*, the BSP made an immediate impact on the dalits vote bank in north India. Dalits in northern India had traditionally rallied behind the Congress party but soon it was found that the BSP was making inroads into the Congress vote bank. In the Lok Sabha elections which were held in December 1984 and the assembly elections in March 1985 though it lost all the seats in the state it contested, it was able to draw million of votes. More importantly it was able to draw the votes of the Congress as a result of which 51 seats went to the Lok Dal (Omvedt, 1994). It was able to repeat its performance in Punjab in the same year held after a few months. It adversely affected the Akali Dal in Punjab. In this period the BSP and DS4 campaigned throughout the country through naïve means and could consolidate its support base further in northern India. Naïve forms of campaign included the use of by-cycles, organising huge cycle and other form of rallies and



awakening programmes. In these campaigns the BSP chose to attack the domination of the upper castes in the society and the wretched condition of the scheduled castes and other downtrodden in the country. This helped the party, extended and consolidated its base and its proof was the Allahabad Lok Sabha bye-elections in 1987. Kanshi Ram as the BSP candidate was able to secure 18 per cent of the popular votes against 24 per cent of Sunil Shastri and 54 percent of V P Singh (Omvedt, 1994). On the whole in the elections, the BSP showed its growing popularity among those social groups, which were earlier with the Congress. It was with this election that the BSP emerged as a central political force and Kanshi Ram became a national figure.

The 1989 Lok Sabha elections followed and the party fared quite well by securing three seats with 2.4 per cent all-India votes from the 235 Lok Sabha constituencies that it contested. With this impressive performance, the BSP was able to become the sixth all India party in terms of votes polled. It continued its electoral gains and was successful in getting itself recognised as a National Party by the Election Commission in 1997. In Uttar Pradesh it has been the largest gainer. Its seats went on increasing in the state assembly from 13 in 1989 to 66 in 1993 (Kumar, 1999). In the elections held in 1996 it gained 66 seats, its best performance however has been in the 2002 elections when it secured 97 seats. This performance of the BSP is remarkable considering that in the previous elections it had secured 66 seats, though its strength ultimately got reduced to 43 by 1998 due to a number of splits in the party. Its vote share in the state has been around 20 per cent, which is very impressive. After having discussed about the spectacular growth of the party let us turn to its ideology and strategy that it had adopted so far.

#### **7.4.1 Ideology**

The BSP ideology has to be understood in the background of the overall effort made towards mobilisation of the dalits since the national movement in India. It must be noted in the beginning that its ideology has been shifting from time to time according to its strategic needs. Gail Omvedt has noted that the BSP ideology can best be described as vague. She argues that there is no clear ideology in the programme and functioning of the party. The sole thrust is on the breaking of the caste system after acquiring state power (Omvedt, 1994). What is, however, true is that it has no economic programmes as such and hence the party is not clear what it intends to do after acquiring power. It is because of this ideological vagueness one finds that most of its agitations are symbolic in nature and it is not around economic issues. And secondly because of this it had vacillated on economic issues after acquiring power in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

Due to this vagueness it becomes very difficult to comment on its ideology. A tentative effort must, however, be made here. One thing that needs to be said in the beginning is that, ideologically the BSP draws heavily from the writings of Ambedkar and to a large extent from the speeches of Kanshi Ram and Mayawati. The party also draws inspiration from Phule and Periar. The central point regarding its ideology is that it provides a critique of the Brahminical social order in the country. In this critique it draws heavily from Phule who provided a critique of Brahmanism and Brahmin power in Maharashtra in the second half of the nineteenth century. The BSP and Kanshi Ram believe that the Indian society consists of two different groups. The first group consists of the low castes including the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and the religious minorities. In the second category it is the Brahmins, Kayasthas, Baniyas and Rajputs or the traditional upper castes (Singh, 2002). The higher castes

though constitute only a minority (around 15 per cent of the population), yet still they manage to rule, because of the votes and thus the consent they acquire from the lower castes. This system, according to the BSP, will not continue and will come to an end as soon as the lower castes capture political power.

In Kanshi Ram's opinion the Brahminical social order that exists is Aryan in its origin. The Aryans evolved this social order after invading India and subjugating the original inhabitants or the *Mool Nivasis* that is the Dravidians in the country. After the Aryan conquest the Dravidians were reduced to the level of untouchables. This social order that came into being after the Aryan conquest to Kanshi Ram is based on caste and not class and it rests upon falsehoods and religious myths. Hence the Brahminical social order, which emerged was a social order that was unjust and in which, Brahminism became the ruling socio-cultural ideology. The purpose of this ideology was the complete justification of the division of the society into major caste groups. Historically, the BSP argues that no Hindu community but only Jati's and the Samaj, ever existed which came into existence. Hence, one notes that the perception of the BSP on the Indian society is similar to the perceptions, which emerged in South India during the colonial period as reflected in the Dravidian movement of Naicker (Periar) and the early ideology of DMK and also that of Phule.

It is from this assessment of the Indian social order that they construct their objective and strategy. The main aim is to end or destroy Brahminical rule and attain political power for the Bahujan's. Attainment or capture of political power is the key to them. According to Kanshi Ram 'political power is the master -key with which you can open any lock, whether it is (a) social, educational or cultural lock' (quoted in Chandra, 2004, p. 145). Therefore, the attainment of political power is central to their strategy by which any transformation (real transformation) can be made. This will help improve the economic advancement of the bahujan's in the society. It is only after the attainment of state power historical injustices can be corrected and the bahujan's and more particularly the dalits can improve their socio-economic conditions. Thus, the BSP believes in total revolution; in the total destruction of the Hindu social order but this was to take place only through the ballot box. It firmly believes that the condition and position of the dalits can improve for the better by a two stage revolution. The first is through electoral victory from the Brahmins and the upper castes those who constitute only around 15 per cent of the Indian population and in the second stage the revolution will penetrate deeper into the society and will thoroughly transform it (Singh, 2002).

The BSP contends that democracy which exists in the country is a fake dominated by the upper castes. It belongs to them. The establishment of this democracy through adult franchise has helped the upper castes and their parties who continue to hold power over the political and social system. The Congress, the dominating political party in the country, has been the political party of the upper castes and had pursued policies throughout for the benefit of the upper castes. The policies, which it pursued for the lower castes did not benefit them at all. In this kind of the situation what is therefore necessary is to establish real and substantial democracy where power would be in the hands of the majority, the dalits –the bahujans.

#### **7.4.2 Limitations of the BSP**

Now let us focus on the problems the limitations which the BSP confronts as a political party. We will see that the limitations the BSP faces are serious enough and some of

these problems are similar to what the other Ambedkarite parties including the RPI had faced earlier.

One of the more serious problems, which it confronts, is the problem of ideology. It appears that the BSP has an exclusive ideology. It has a programme for the dalits in the country but not for the vast mass of the poor even though it claims that it represents the majority or the bahujans. Secondly, the ideological programme does not contain any economic programme for the category which it sought to mobilise. In the absence of an economic package or content the BSP ideology looks very limited, or restricted to social justice alone. That is why it has become difficult for the BSP to pursue or give directions to economic policies whenever it has attained power in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Thus the ideology of the BSP happens to be an exclusive one.

The second problem with the BSP, which Jagpal Singh (2002) and others have noted is that the BSP is a leader-centric party. Though it has adequate number of leaders and functionaries, yet it is a party in every sense led by its supremo Kanshi Ram and to some extent by Mayawati though in more recent times Kanshi Ram had been sidelined. On several important occasions it is these two important leaders who have taken decisions alone by ignoring the party altogether. This is a problem, which we have noted earlier, a problem common with the Ambedkarite parties formed after the death of Ambedkar. The RPI and other Ambedkarite parties have faced similar kind of problems. Even Ambedkar himself never had any inclination for a strong organisation and an organised movement. Ambedkar's biographer Keer has noted that:

Ambedkar did not try to organise his political party on modern lines. He had no taste for individual organisation. There were no regular annual conferences or general meetings of the organisations with which he was connected. Where and when he sat was the venue of the conference and the time for decision (quoted in Ian Duncan, 2001).

The more serious problem with the BSP is its limited social base. Despite of all the talks of Bahujan Samaj and all the claims that the BSP will represent 85 per cent of the population in the Indian society the fact remains that in north India it remains a political party of Chamars/Jatavs. The Chamars constitute the backbone of the BSP support. We have seen earlier that the Chamars or the Jatavs in Uttar Pradesh were the most politicised of the castes in the state. It is this caste which benefited from the policy of reservation of the central and the state governments and it is this category that forms the backbone of the BSP. It does not represent the interest of the Balmikis or the Pasis who are the poorest among the dalits but it represents only the elite among the dalits. In UP it had expected to increase its appeal, it has even attempted to become a catchall political party but failed miserably in this effort. The primary contenders in UP of the party are the Samajwadi Party, the BJP and the Congress. In a situation of this in a fragmented party system where the competition is highly multi-cornered kind it looks very unlikely that the BSP will be able to improve its vote share further though in terms of seats it may gain some more seats as seen in the 2002 elections. The expansion of its social base is more unlikely also because the BSP governments in the state have clearly shown its caste bias in favour of the Chamars which alienated other castes and the minority communities from it. Moreover, apart from UP the BSP does not have a significant presence in other states especially in the west, southern states and the east.

Fourthly, since the prime agenda of the BSP is to capture power and this had led the party to pursue unusual strategies to attain power in Uttar Pradesh. It had formed alliances with parties with which it does not have any ideological and programmatic affinity at all. Its alliance for example with BJP on three different occasions including during the 2002 elections has raised considerable doubts about the sanguine purpose and objective of the party. This had two different kinds of effects. In political circles and in the eyes of the electorate, the BSP's credibility has gone down; very often it has been referred to as an opportunist party ready to form coalitions with strange forces. This kind of opportunism and lack of purpose to a large extent has eroded the credibility among a large section of the non-dalits, these non-dalits are included by the BSP in the category of bahujans. With these limitations, the BSP will find it extremely difficult to expand its social base among these sections of the community. But despite these limitations the progress of the BSP in the recent years particularly in the 1990s has been dramatic.

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## 7.5 SUMMARY

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A brief survey of dalit mobilisation and movements in India in the contemporary period reveals that though the mobilisation of dalits at an India level had started prior to independence with the efforts of Ambedkar who differed with Gandhi and the Congress, it gained momentum with the mobilisation efforts of the BSP after its formation in 1984. The BSP had succeeded in many respects, it had mobilised dalits politically to a significant extent in some states. Though it suffers from its own set of problems it has succeeded in coming to political power in the largest state of Uttar Pradesh which no dalit organisation either formed by Ambedkar or later was able to do. All this probably indicate that in future years there will be greater participation, assertion and mobilisation of dalits at the all India level.

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## 7.6 EXERCISES

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- 1) Explain the meaning of "dalit" and discuss dalit mobilisation during the pre-colonial period.
- 2) Critically evaluate the growth, ideology and the social base of the Bahujan Samaj Party.
- 3) What are the limitations of the BSP? Discuss.

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## UNIT 8 BACKWARD CLASS MOVEMENTS

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### Structure

- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Who are the Backward Classes?
- 8.3 Socio-Economic Conditions of the Backward Classes: Impact of the State Policies
- 8.4 Backward Class Movement in the Post-Independence Period
  - 8.4.1 North-South Comparison
  - 8.4.2 The Electoral Mobilisation
  - 8.4.3 Politics of Reservation
- 8.5 Summary
- 8.6 Exercises

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### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

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Past three decades have seen the emergence of the backward classes in different fields of life. This has been more spectacular in electoral politics. Though backward classes became a significant social and political force in some parts of the country, especially south India even earlier, they got national attention following the introduction of the Mandal Commission Report by the V P Singh-led government at the centre in 1990. This unit deals with different aspects related to the collective actions of the backward classes in India.

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### 8.2 WHO ARE THE BACKWARD CLASSES?

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Marc Galanter in his book *Competing Equalities: Law and The Backward Classes in India* observes that backward classes is a very loose concept. Sociologically, these classes consist of a large number of the backward castes which remain above the Scheduled Castes and below the upper castes. These castes consist of intermediate castes — the cultivating castes, artisans and service castes. In the traditional social and economic structures, while the intermediary castes were involved in the production process in the land, the service castes and artisans provided services to the society. The backward classes known as the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), are other than those backward classes, which include the dalits/Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. The principal intermediary OBCs are Yadavs, Kurmies, Koeris, Gujjars and Jats in north Indian states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and some of them in Haryana and Madhya Pradesh; Kappus, Kammas, Reddies, Vokkaliggas, Lingayats, Mudliars in south Indian states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu; Patles, Kolis, Kshatriyas and Marathas in west Indian states like Gujarat and Maharashtra. They belong to the upper or dominant backward classes. The service castes and artisans, principal castes among them being carpenters, blacksmiths, barbers, water carriers, etc., are found in almost all states in varying numbers. They are also known as the Most Backward Castes (MBCs) in some states. Their relations were regulated by *Jajamani* System. In this system the service castes and artisans were known as clients of the dominant or superior castes. The latter included both the high castes and the intermediary



cultivating castes. In this unit the backward classes and Other Backward Classes will be used interchangeably.

The OBCs, in fact, include heterogeneous caste groups with differences in their social and economic conditions and political participation. Even the OBCs which share common characteristics in terms of their place in the social hierarchy differ from each other depending on their agrarian history. Not all intermediary castes which are now identified as OBCs belonged to the inferior group so far as their position in the agrarian structure was concerned. For example, Jats in most part of UP, Punjab which also consisted of the area of present day Haryana and Bharatpur region of Rajasthan were a dominant community even in the pre-Independence period. They had their own traditional caste councils or *khaps* headed by the hereditary chief or *chaudhary* to manage their juridical and social affairs. They were independent peasant-proprietors involved in the cultivation of land; they did not have the landlord above them and they paid rent to the state through their own representatives. While they were independent of any landlord between them and the state, they were placed in the dominant position over other village communities. But most of other intermediary castes were not independent peasant-proprietors. They were the tenants of landlords, who in several instances were the absentee. They were exploited by the latter in several ways. These intermediary castes were subjected to the exploitation of the landlords like the service and artisan castes. Thus, despite belonging to different castes, the intermediate castes, artisans and service castes shared certain cultural and economic characteristics. That is why the OBCs are those castes which are educationally and socially backward, not necessarily economically and politically.

To get categorised or recognised as an OBC, is political issue. A community should possess enough political clout to get itself identified as an OBC. There are several instances of demand by the castes to get themselves identified as OBCs. In 1999 the Rajasthan government and in 2000 the Uttar Pradesh government added the Jats to the lists of OBCs.

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### **8.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF THE BACKWARD CLASSES: IMPACT OF THE STATE POLICIES**

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The backward classes emerged as a powerful social, economic and political block during the post-independence period in the countryside as a result of the policies of the state. But there have remained internal differentiation among them. While the intermediary castes came to control the affairs of the village society, the artisans and the service castes joined the ranks of the marginalised groups of the wage labourers, marginal and poor farmers. Even though the upper backward or the intermediary castes also are undergoing differentiation in terms of the economic and educational entitlements, in political terms these differences get blurred. It will be imperative to discuss the impact of the state policies on the rise of the backward classes in the country. The principal policies which impacted them included: the land reforms which consisted of the abolition of landlordism, putting ceilings on the size of the landholdings, consolidation of landholdings, and Green Revolution in the selected areas of the country; welfare schemes for the welfare of the lower backward classes. Besides, the state policies the changes which occurred from within the society — population growth, breaking down of the



jajmani system also affected them. Although the state policies in different states of the country did not have the uniform and desired impact on the backward classes in the country, they definitely gave rise to the backward classes. They became the owners of their land, which they had been cultivation before the land reforms as the tenants, captured the local level political institutions like village panchayats in several parts of the country. On account of their numerical strength along with the control on the village land they came to control the village vote banks. All the upper backward classes are relevant examples of this change — Jats, Yadavs, Kurmies, Gujjars, Kappus, Kammas, Reddies, Lingayats, Vokkaligas, Patels, Kolis, Marathas, etc., in different regions of the country.

It must be emphasised that among the state policies it was the Green Revolution which had the most remarkable impact on the rural economic, social and political life. Most of the groups affected by this belonged to the upper backward classes. It not only disturbed the traditional patterns of relations it also gave rise to the emergence of capitalism in agriculture. It was marked by the mechanisation, displacement of human labour in agriculture and development of market economy and commercialisation of agriculture. Even the capitalism had the differential impact on the backward classes. While the upper backward produced mainly for the market and remained largely the self-cultivators, those belonging to the lower backwards joined the ranks of the wage labourers in the agriculture or the non-agrarian sectors or even migrated to the cities.

The fact that the OBCs belong to distinct economic categories and to the middle castes and the artisans and the service castes have given rise to the issues which are both economic and caste-related. As you study in sub-sections 8.4.2 and 8.4.3, these have been the focus of the mobilisation of backward classes through out the post-Independence period both at the national and state levels. However, the nature of these issues have changed over a period of time. For example, the social issues were combined with those of abolitions of landlordism and demand for providing ownership right to them in land before the implementation of the first phase of land reforms. These were replaced by the issues which emerged mainly after the Green Revolution — remunerative price of the crops, subsidised inputs, better infrastructure along with the issue of reservation in the political institutions and public jobs for the backward classes.

Another factor which is related to the changes in the socio-economic conditions of the backward classes is rise of a middle class among the OBCs. Despite the failure of the education policies a group of educated persons, who became their spokespersons, had emerged among the backward classes. However, this group was not as big as it was among the high castes. In north India Charan Singh, S. D. Singh Chaurasia and Chaudhry Brahm Prakash were some of the spokes persons of the backward classes belonging to the early decades following Independence.

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## **8.4 BACKWARD CLASS MOVEMENT IN THE POST INDEPENDENCE PERIOD**

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### **8.4.1 North-South Comparison**

In comparison to North India, the backward classes in south India were mobilised much earlier. They not only got reservation in the government jobs but they were also mobilised

into the social movement and entered politics in south India much before than the backward classes of North India. Christophe Jaffrelot in his book *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Low Castes in North Indian Politics* attributes the early rise of backward classes in South India and their late rise in North India to the processes of ethnicisation and *sanskritisation* respectively. Through ethnicisation the backward classes of south India questioned the Brahminical domination and sought to replace it with that of the backward classes or *dravidians*. It was a revolt against *sanskritisation* in south. They not only got reservation in the public institutions and they replaced the brahminical domination in politics also. As compared to the north Indian states, where reservations for the OBCs were introduced from the 1970s at different points of time, the south India states had completed the process of granting reservation for the OBCs by the 1960s. This process in south India, in fact, had started as far back as in 1921 when the Maharaja of Mysore decided to implement reservation for the OBCs in the government jobs in order to end the Brahmin monopoly there. In the post-independence period different states in south India appointed backward classes commissions under pressure from the backward classes organisations and political parties, which espoused for the causes of the backward classes. In contrast, the north Indian backward classes were undergoing the process *sanskritisation*. Unlike their counterparts in south India they attempted to follow the customs, habits and rituals of the high castes. Several backward castes traced their lineages to the high castes — Brahmins or Kshatriyas.

Scholars explain this difference between north and south in the following way. The Brahmins had monopolised the high castes domination over the low castes in South India and their number in comparison to Brahmins of north India was much smaller. In contrast, the Brahmins were not the only high castes in north India. Their domination over the low castes was shared, thus diluted, by several high castes - Rajputs, Kayasthas or even Vaishyas. In north India the organisation like Arya Samaj spread the message among the backward classes that it was the *karma* not the birth which determined the place of a person in society. While it encouraged the backward classes to *sanskritise* themselves by tracing their lineages to the high castes, wearing *janeo* (sacred threads), etc., it also attempted to bring back to Hinduism those Muslims who were supposed to have converted from Hindu religion through the *Suddhi* movement. This instead of challenging the hegemony of the high castes or Brahminism revived it and strengthened it. As a result it dampened the chances of strong backward class movement in north India. The backward classes virtually were the non-Brahmin classes in south India. Unlike their counterparts in north India, they did not attempt to follow the high casts, i.e. Brahmins, they in fact questioned their domination in culture, administration and politics. The most effective expression of the dravidian revolt against the Brahmin domination in south was provided by the Self-Respect Movement led by E. V. Ramaswami Naicker, alias Periyar, during the 1920s and 1940s. The Self-Respect Movement was based on the premise that the original inhabitants of India were non-Brahmins or the dravidians, not the Brahmins. The main principle of this movement was *Samadharma* or equality. In order to get their self-respect and the non-Brahmins should replace the dominance of Brahmins in education, culture, politics and administration. The Self-Respect Movement included: boycott of Brahmins in rituals like weddings; condemnation of *varnashrama dharma*; burning of *Manu Smriti*. The non-Brahmins added suffix "Dravida" and "Adi" to their associations. M. C. Raja (1883-1947) was another advocate of the dravidian ideology. He became president of the Adi Dravida Mahasabha in 1916 and chaired the All India Depressed Classes Association since 1928.

Not only in south India even in west India the backward classes were mobilised much earlier in comparison to north. Jyotiba Phule belonging to backward Mali caste who became a source of inspiration for the latter day social reformers including E.V. Naicker, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and the non-Brahmin Maratha rulers of Kolhapur Sahuji Maharaj, set up *Satya Shodhak Samaj* in 1873 in the Bombay Presidency in order to mobilise the low castes including dalits and non-Brahmins or backward classes. *Satya Shodhak Samaj* was able to unite untouchables and backward caste peasants. Christophe Jeffrelot considers Phule to be the first social reformer who did not fall into the “traps of sanskritisation”. He was also the first reformer who worked for the alliance of the *Bahujan Samaj*, the low castes, backward peasant classes and untouchables. He gave Aryan theory which suggested that the high castes Aryan were not the original inhabitants of India; they had come from outside. The original inhabitants were the untouchable, artisans, services castes and the peasant backward classes. The high cases had subjugated the low castes and established their dominance over them. His Aryan theory inspired several low castes leaders of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the latter period; Mangoo Ram held that the dalits in Punjab were Ad Dharmis; Achhootanand in UP held that dalits in UP were Adi-Hindus; and south Indian reformers believed that the Brahmins were outsider Aryans in their areas, and they as dravidains were the original inhabitants of their area.

The Maratha princes like Maharaja of Baroda and descendent of Shivaji, Maharaja of Kolhapur, Shahu, inspired by the philosophy of Phule challenged Brahmins’ domination of their administration. Shahu introduced policies to empower the non-Brahmins in administration and to end Brahmin’s domination in it. He set up boarding houses for the students belonging to the low castes; made primary education free and compulsory in 1917; and most importantly he introduced 50 per cent reservation of seats in government jobs for the “members of backward communities” in the state administration. He also encouraged Marathas to replace the Brahmins in administration and replaced the Brahmin priests with them. Again, the British administration reserved seven seats for the Marathas and allied castes in the Legislative Council of the Bombay Presidency in 1919. Organisations like All India Maratha Mali Union, Yadav Gavli Association emerged in the Bombay Presidency. These organisations strove to forge an alliance of different non-Brahmin castes.

#### **8.4.2 The Electoral Mobilisation**

The backward class politics in India has largely been related to electoral mobilisation and creation of support base among them by the political parties and leaders. Other issues like the reservation for the OBCs or their mobilisation on the class issues like those related to the farmers also get linked to the electoral politics. The increasing participation of the OBCs, their entry into the state legislatures and parliament is indicative of the empowerment of the backward classes. During the post-Independence period there have been attempts on the parts of individual leaders and political organisations to mobilise the backward classes into the participatory politics. While the backward classes in south India emerged before the independence and they benefited from this legacy in the post-Independence period, in the north India their systemic mobilisation took place in the post-interdependence period. The main leaders and political parties which mobilised the backward classes in north India include Charan Singh, Karpoori Thakur, Socialist parties and the different political formations at different point of times like Samajwadi Party and Rashtriya Janata Dal in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Charan Singh carved out a political base for himself among the middle caste peasantry in UP and Bihar through a well designed strategy. He could do this while he was still a member of the Congress Party. Though Jats, the caste he belonged to did not fall in the official category of the OBCs till 2000 in UP and 1999 in Rajasthan, he identified himself with the backward classes of UP and Bihar. These castes were mainly Yadavs, Kurmies, Koeries, Kachhis, Lodhs, etc. His strategy was two fold — he combined the caste issue with the class issue. Through out the 1950s and 1960s, he addressed a large number of meetings of the backward classes belonging to Yadavs, Kurmies, Koeries and Lodhs in UP; attended the backward class meeting in Badhoi in 1953. He also praised the role of Congress in abolition of landlordism, in which he had played prominent and decisive role. These activities of Charan Singh projected him as a backward class leader. This created division within the Congress; a section of the high caste Congress leadership accused him of identifying with the backward classes. They argued that Charan Singh's activities had alienated Congress from the high castes, and suggested that attempts should be made to win back support of these castes to the Congress. Charan Singh defended himself by arguing that he was not favouring the backward classes. Rather the Congress had neglected them. When Charan came out of Congress in 1967 and formed the *Samyukta Vidhayak Dal's* (SVD's) coalition government, he gave 29.63 per cent representation to the backward classes in ministry. Merger of his Bharatiya Kranti Dal headed by him with the Samyukt Socialist Party (SSP) which resulted in the formation of the Bharatiya Lok Dal in 1974 made him a close ally of the socialists. This won him ally allies among the backward classes in both state — UP and Bihar. Through the allies like Karpoori Thakur in Bihar and Devi Lal in Haryana, Charan Singh emerged as a leader of the backward classes and peasantry in north India. Meanwhile, after becoming the self-cultivators as a result of the land reforms, Green Revolution and having availed of educational and other policies a generation of leaders belonging to the intermediary castes emerged on the political scene by the 1970s in north India. After the death of Charan Singh in 1987 and Karpoori Thakur in 1989, they have come to occupy a an important place in politics of north India, especially UP and Bihar. Mulayam Singh Yadav, Lallu Prasad Yadav and Nitish Kunar provide some of such example. As far back as 1930s in Bihar, three major backward classes — Yadavs, Kurmies and Koeries formed *Treveni Sangh* to replace the dominance of high castes — Brahmins, Bhumihars and Rajputs in the electoral politics. This alliance, however, could not sustain after the elections of 1937.

Sanjay Kumar observes in his article “New Phase in Backward Caste Politics in Bihar, 1990-2000” (1999) that it was 1995 assembly election in Bihar which showed a new trend towards the empowerment of the OBCs in the state. It was marked by the polarisation of the backward support base; Yadavs supported the Janata Dal while the Kurmies and Koeries supported Samata Party. The fact remains that despite the division in their support to different parties including the BJP, the OBCs have become a force to reckon with in politics of Bihar. The division of support of backward classes to different parties is indicative to the competitive politics among the backward classes, to their empowerment. In case of Gujarat Ghanshyam Shah argues that the OBCs' support to BJP there does not mean their support to the ideology of “Brahminical dominance”. It is “part of an electoral game” in which the needs of the upper backward classes are satisfied.

It can be said that after the backward classes have emerged as a social block by the 1970s in north India their mobilisation has largely been in terms of electoral politics, i. e. allotment of tickets by political parties to the OBCs, their entry into the legislative assemblies and parliament and formation of governments by the political parties headed by the backward class leaders or those who identified with them. The political parties with different denominations led by Charan Singh, Janata Dals of different factions and Samajwadi Pary led by Mulayam Singh Yadav can be identified as backward class parties. The emergence of the BSP in the 1980s as a political force opened an opportunity for an alliance of the Bahujan Samaj, the backward classes and the dalits. This brought the together the Bahujan Samaj Party and BSP — the representatives of the OBCs and dalits, together to form the government in UP in 1993-1994. But because of the contradictions among the OBCs and dalit social basis of these parties and personality differences among the leaders, they could not continue the alliance. Even a large number of the BJP leaders belong to the OBCs.

It must be noted that the backward class mobilisation by different parties has largely been confined to the upper backward or the intermediate castes, who form the dominant sections of the village society. The artisans and the service castes, generally known as the Most Backward Classes (MBCs) remain largely excluded from empowerment. However, some attempts are also made to empower them. For example, in 1975 the Congress government appointed the Most Backward Class Commission in UP generally known as Sathi Commission named after its chairman, Chhedi Lal Sathi. Even Rajnath Singh, the BJP Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh appointed Social Justice Forum under the chairmanship of Hukum Singh in 2001 in order to suggest measures to empower the MBCs of UP. But these measures were unsuccessful for one or the other reasons.

At the same time when Charan Singh was attempting to carve out his base among the backward classes in UP, the socialists were also involved in this pursuit in north India. In an attempt to end the monopoly of the high castes Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia sought to mobilise the backward classes as soon as he broke away from the Congress. He advocated 60 per cent reservation for the backward classes, dalits and minorities in the government jobs. Merger of the Indian National Backward Classes Federation, a splinter group of the All India Backward Classes Federation in 1957 with the Socialist Party brought the socialists and the backward classes together. Through out the 1960s socialists and backward class leadership continued to raise the issues of the backward classes. The most important of these was the demand to implement the Kaka Kalelkar report. Leaders like Mulayam Singh Yadav and B. P. Mandal were active during this period. But by the 1970s the AIBCF became defunct. However, the emergent backward class leadership continued to raise their issues even after that.

### **8.4.3 Politics of Reservation**

The introduction of Mandal Commission Report by the V P Singh's government in 1990 recommending reservation 27 per cent reservation for the OBCs in the central government jobs made the reservation a national issue in Indian politics. It not only drew reactions in its support or against it, it also changed the contours of Indian politics. The appointment of Mandal Commission by the Janata Party government in 1990 was result of the pressure of the backward classes leadership and their clout. As mentioned



earlier by the 1970s the backward classes, especially those belonging to the intermediate castes had already made their presence felt in the politics of India and states.

The demand for reservation for the backward classes was raised in the Constituent Assembly by Punjab Rao Deshmukh, like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had raised the similar demand for the Scheduled Castes. In order to articulate the reservation issue for the backward classes he founded All India Backward Classes Federation (AIBCF) on 26 January 1950. Within the AIBCF the differences grew between those having allegiance to the Congress on the one hand and those having allegiance to the Socialist Lohiaites. This resulted in the split in the AIBCF, with the splinter group naming itself as National Backward Classes Federation (NBCF). The former was headed by Punjab Rao Deshmukh, a Congress leader and the latter was headed by R L Chandpuri. After the death of Chandpuri, Chaudhry Brahm Praksah became its leader. Besides, a large number of informal and unregistered organisations existed in different states and different levels in country.

The Mandal Commission was result of the consistent demand by the backward class leadership to get the Kaka Kalelkar Commission's, the first backward class commission report accepted. The Kaka Kalelkar Commission was also the result of the demand for such commission by the backward class leadership at the time of Independence. But Kaka Kalelkar's recommendations of class as the criterion for identification of the backward classes and rejection of the Commission's report by the parliament led to the demand of appointment of another commission which would take social and educational backwardness as the criteria for identification of the backward classes.

The implementation of the Mandal Commission report, however, has not settled the issue of reservation. Newer groups continue to demand to be recognised themselves as the OBCs. Whether a community can get itself identified as OBCs is a political question; it depends on the political factors.

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## 8.5 SUMMARY

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The backward classes are also known as the Other Backward Classes or the OBCs. They consist of the heterogeneous groups — the intermediate peasant castes, artisans and the service castes. While the intermediate castes among the OBCs or the upper backward have emerged as among the most assertive social group in the country, the other sections of the OBCs also known as the Most Backward Classes (MBCs) remain excluded from the preview of development and empowerment. The backward class movement started late in north India as compared to south India.

The mobilisation of the OBCs has been around two issues — their electoral participation and the reservation. In north India they have been mobilised by Charan Singh, Socialists including Ram Manohar Lohia, Karpoori Tahkur and different political parties. They linked the social issues of the OBCs with the economic issues of the peasantry. The appointment of Kaka Kalelkar and Mandal Commissions and the implementation of the latter's report were result of the backward class mobilisation. The mobilisation of the backward classes on their recognition as OBCs, appointment of backward class commissions, politics related to them — the support and opposition to them, continue to remain relevant in the politics of social movement in India.



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## 8.6 EXERCISES

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- 1) Who are the backward classes? Discuss the impact of the state policies on their emergence.
- 2) Compare the conditions of the backward classes in north India with those in south India.
- 3) Discuss the patterns of mobilisation of backward classes in electoral politics.
- 4) Write a note on the reservation politics.

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## UNIT 9 ETHNIC MOVEMENTS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO TRIBALS

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### Structure

- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 What are Ethnic Movements?
- 9.3 Approaches to Study Ethnic Movements
- 9.4 Ethnic Movements During Post-independence Period: A General View
- 9.5 Ethnic Movements with Special Reference to Tribals
  - 9.5.1 Who are Tribals?
  - 9.5.2 Tribals of North-East India or the Frontier Tribes
  - 9.5.3 Tribals of Regions other than North-East India or the Non-frontier Tribes
- 9.6 Summary
- 9.7 Exercise

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### 9.1 INTRODUCTION

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Even before India could assume its present shape a sovereign, democratic and secular republic following the attainment of Independence from the British rule, different ethnic groups have been clamouring for their recognition in the society in terms of cultural, economy and politics. Such claims became more strident after the country became independent. As the time passes more and more claims are made by several groups, many of whom were not visible on the political scene earlier. Many scholars categorise such movements as ethnic movements. This unit attempts to discuss ethnic movements in India with special reference to the tribals.

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### 9.2 WHAT ARE ETHNIC MOVEMENTS?

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For a proper understanding of ethnic movements it necessary to understand what we mean by ethnicity as such movements are associated with it. Ethnicity is denotes towards identification of a group of people on the basis of certain criteria or markers which they are supposed to share with each other. These markers include culture, race, language, religion, customs, history, economic experiences, etc. For a group of people to share such attributes another requirement is that they get mobilised into some collective action for attainment of certain demands. The number of markers or attributes which form the basis of an ethnic group depends on the choice of these factors by the ethnic group or its leadership. But there are differences among the scholars regarding the number of attributes which constitute and ethnic group. Scholars in India generally consider that mobilisation as ethnic which is based on the multiple attributes — language, religion, culture, history, economy, etc. For example, the language based mobilisation is considered as linguistic mobilisation and the groups as such is considered as linguistic group. Similarly caste based mobilisation is considered as dalit, backward or any other caste mobilisation. In India the religion-based mobilisation is called communal mobilisation. But the scholars who follow American and European traditions catergorise even the mobilisation based on the single attribute — language, religion, caste, etc, as ethnic mobilisation. They also do not distinguish between the communal and ethnic mobilisation.

For example, Paul R. Brass uses ethnic and communal mobilisation interchangeably. On the other hand, Dipankar Gupta in his book *The Context of Ethnicity: The Sikh Identity in a Comparative Perspective* differentiates between communalism and ethnicity. He argues that the ethnic mobilisation is related to the nation-state — the territory and the sovereignty. And the communal mobilisation does not involve the nation-state. It is confined to the government and two or more communities in the conflict, one of which alleges that the government discriminates against it in preference to the other. The point in dispute could be job, specific rights of the communities, etc. According to him in the ethnic mobilisation the loyalty of one ethnic group to the referent of nation-state is questioned. It is not so in the case of communal mobilisation. Also, the group identities are not permanent. In the changing context of time and space an ethnic identity can become communal and vice versa. However, the general tendency among the scholars is to consider the multi-attributes mobilisation of the communities as ethnic.

Ethnicity is also a relative term. An ethnic group differentiates itself from another groups which also shares certain attributes which are different from it. It feels that it has to preserve its identity and interests from the perceived or real threats of other ethnic groups and institutions, and processes associated with them. Ethnic movements are concerned with the preservation and protection of the cultural identities of the ethnic groups and their other interests. Another concept which is related to the ethnicity is nationality or nation. While some scholars differentiate between ethnicity, nationalities or even nations they are used interchangeably. If one section of scholars considers a multiple-marker based mobilisation as ethnic, there are others which call these as the mobilisation of the nations or the nationalities. Therefore, in the light of the literature available the terms ethnicity and nationalities/nations are used interchangeably in this unit.

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### 9.3 APPROACHES TO STUDY ETHNIC MOVEMENTS

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You have already in unit 2 about the approaches to study social movements which include ethnic movements also. There are, however, some approaches which are used specifically to study the ethnic movements. The most commonly used approaches to study the ethnic movements are: the primordial, the instrumentalist and the approach which combines the features of primordial and instrumentalist approaches. The primordial approach holds that the basis of the formation of the ethnic groups are “given”. There are traits of an ethnic group which are inherited by them, i.e., culture, language, customs, religions, etc. Similarly other ethnic group also has certain inherited characteristics. Since the differences in the markers of various ethnic groups vary from each other, they involve in the ethnic movements because of these “given” traits. There are bound to be conflict between different ethnic groups. The advocates of the instrumentalist approach on the other hand believe that ethnic groups are creation of the leadership or the elites belonging to these groups. The differences in the language, culture, customs, economic conditions of the people or the social cleavages are manipulated by the elite of the ethnic groups to generate ethnic consciousness and start ethnic movements. There both real and imagined reasons for the formation of ethnic movements and generation of the ethnic movements. The ethnic community when created on the basis of imagined attributes are thus “imagined” or “constructed” communities. The advocates of the third approach believe that both of these approaches are marked into “bi-polarity” — the basis of ethnicity is either “given” or “imagined” or “constructed”. But there are problems with both of these approaches. While the “primordial” approach does not explain why and

how an ethnic group gets mobilised into the collective action, the “instrumentalist” approach does not explain as to why an ethnic group responds to the call of the elite, leaders or politicians. They advocate a combination of both the primordial and instrumentalist approaches instead of “bi-polar” approach.

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## **9.4 ETHNIC MOVEMENTS DURING POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD: A GENERAL VIEW**

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Almost all the major regions of the country have witnessed ethnic movements. They take the forms of movements for regional autonomy, for creation of separate states, demand for secession or insurgency. These manifestations of ethnic movements are also called self-determination movements. In several cases ethnic movements give rise to conflicts or riots on the lines of ethnic divide based on all or some the markers – tribe, caste, language, religion, etc. The self-determination movements actually question the nation-state building model which was introduced by the Independent India. Known as Nehruvian or the Mahalanobis model this model presumed that in the course of development or modernisation the identities formed on the basis of ascriptive factors – language, caste, tribe, religion will disappear and the development will take place on the secular lines. But much before the effect of this model could be felt, it was questioned on the all major consideration – language, region and nationality. Although the movements started with the demand based on single marker like language or culture, they drew support of people who shared more than one attribute in a particular region. Starting with the rejection of the Indian Constitution by the Nagas in the North-East, (see sub-section 9.5.4) it spread in the form of Dravidian ethnic movement and demand for the formation of linguistic states with classic example of the movement of for creation of separate state of Andhra Pradesh in South, movements in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab and Shiv Sena's against South Indians in Mumbai.

In Tamil Nadu following the legacy of E V Ramaswami Naicker three issues formed the basis of ethnic movement in the first two decades following independence – language, dravidian culture, and religion. The leadership of the movement argued that imposition of the North Indian Hindi language, Brahminical Hindu religion and Aryan culture were detrimental to the development of the dravidian identity. Therefore, the Tamil ethnic movement had demanded, stopping of the imposition of Hindi language secession from India. However, towards the end of the 1960s the demand for secession was given up by the Tamil nationality/ethnic group. It then shift its demand to get autonomy to the states. Though the Dravidian assertion in India has become milder since the late 1960s, sentiments against the imposition of Hindi language still are important factors of mobilisation there. In the light of the movements and violence generated by them prompted Salig S. Harrison to describe the decades of the 1950s-1960s as the “most dangerous decades”.

The state was initially reluctant to reconsider the demand for the linguistic reorganisation of the state. But it had to consider this demand following the death of a Gandhian P. Srinivasulu who died of hunger strike demanding a linguistic state of Andhra Pradesh. Government's acceptance of demand to create Andhra Pradesh led to the reorganisation of the states on the linguistic basis in 1953. But reorganisation of the state did not halt the demand for the separate states.

The ethnic movement in Punjab was based on three types of issues – regional, religious and economic. Spearheaded by the Akali Dal, the leadership in Punjab argued that since Sikhs follow a separate religion and speak different language, they should get a separate state. On some occasions, it got reflected in the communal divide between the Hindus and Sikhs in the state, resulting in the ethnic conflict. They launched a Punjabi Suba movement during the 1950s and 1960s demanding a separate state of Punjab for them. Baldev Raj Nayar observes that Akali Dal's strategy during the Punjabi Suba movement included constitutional means like memoranda, rallies and marches; penetration into the Congress organisation in order to influence the party in favour of a separate state; and, agitational means which included marches to shrines, intimidation and force. As a result of the Punjabi Suba movement, Punjab was created as separate state on November 1, 1966. According to Paul R Brass, the attitude of the central government towards the ethnic conflicts or mobilisation in the 1950s and 1960s was marked by an unwritten code — aversion to the demands for creation of the states on the religious grounds; no concession to the demands of the linguistic, regional or other culturally defined groups; no concession to groups involved in ethnic dispute unless there was support to the demand from both groups involved in the conflict. In his opinion, demand for creation of a separate state of Punjab was accepted only when there was also a demand for creation of the separate state of Harayana for Hindi speaking population of the same state.

The ethnic movement in Punjab again arose in the 1980s. It challenged the sovereignty of the Indian state the notion of India as a nation-state. It sought to establish a sovereign state of Khalistan, to be based on the tenets of Sikhism. The Khalistan movement and the issues related to were generally referred to as “Punjab Crisis”. The movement became violent and came to be identified with terrorism in the popular, academic and political discourse. The advocates of the Khalistan movement argued that Sikhs, as followers of the minority religion have been discriminated in India despite their contribution to Indian economy and army. The rise of Khalistan movement, terrorism or the in the 1980s has been a sequence to the political developments in the country which preceded it. The 1970s were marked by the challenge of the Akali Dal to the dominance of the Congress in Punjab. In order to meet this challenge the Congress took the help of Sikh religious leader Sant Jarnail Singh Bhinderanwale in the 1980 Legislative assembly elections in Punjab. The use of services of Bhinderanwale had its cultural and political implication for the country and the state. It encouraged Bhinderanwale to assert his authority independently and assume the leadership of the Khalistan movement. Not only a large number of Sikh youths were attracted to the movement, the movement also received support of the foreign forces. The state responded with the Operation Blue Star: sending of the armed forces to nab terrorists who were hiding in the Golden Temple at Amritsar including Sant Bhinderanwale. This ultimately led to the assassination of Indira Gandhi. The Khalistan movement also resulted in the ethnic divide between the Hindus and Sikhs in Punjab.

The scholars have explained the ethnic movement of the 1970s and 1980s in Punjab in terms of socio-economic and political factors. Those who explain it in terms of the socio-economic factors follow the Marxian perspective. They argue that the “Punjab Crisis” occurred in the wake of green revolution; inability of the Sikh farmers to meet the rising cost of investment in agriculture, rising unemployment among the youth and growth of the consumerist culture which gave rise to the feeling of losing Sikh identity,

etc., contributed to the rise of militancy in Punjab. The scholars who give the political explanation find the socio-economic explanation inadequate. They argue that the Punjab crisis was the result of a manipulation of the religion and problems of the people by the politicians.

The basis of ethnic movement in Jammu and Kashmir are language, religion and geographical location. A section of people of the state have argued since the ethnic composition of state in terms of language, religion and geography is different from the dominant ethnic groups in the country, region should be treated differently. Some of them have not considered themselves as members of the Union of India. As a result, they have demanded cessation from India; some have advocated merger with Pakistan, some have demanded a separate state for the region and some have advocated merger of two Kashmirs — one occupied by Pakistan and other of India, to become a single state. Supporters of this perspective have launched insurgency involving violence and loss human beings and material. They are supported by the foreign forces, especially Pakistan. The popular leadership in the state has also been divided on the issue of relationship of the state with the nation-state. Hari Singh, the ruler of the Jammu and Kashmir initially opposed the accession of the state into the union of India. But he had to agree to it in the face of attack of the Pakistani forces. Sheikh Abdullah had supported the merger of the state with Union of India. But in the course of time he wavered on the issue. He formed Plebiscite Front, which led to his incarceration by the central government from 1953 till 1964. According to Balraj Puri the reasons for the insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir include: attitude of the central government, the lack of opposition in the state, derailment of democracy by the central and state leadership, rising unemployment and other problems of people, cold war and Pakistan. Even within Jammu and Kashmir there are ethnic movements by the smaller groups in Laddakh and Jammu and Kashmir, demanding autonomy within the state of Jammu and Kashmir. These regions allege that they are discriminated against by the dominant religious communities and prosperous regions — Muslims of Kashmir.

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## **9.5 ETHNIC MOVEMENTS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO TRIBALS**

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In the earlier section you have studied about the ethnic movement in general, specifically regarding the non-tribals. In this section you will study about the ethnic movements of the tribals of India. In fact, the tribals provide the most appropriate examples of the ethnic movements in the country. In their case, almost all factors, both real and imagined, which the tribal communities share among themselves – culture, customs, language, race, religion (indigenous or otherwise), economic issues, contribute to their mobilisation. Even if the their mobilisation starts with a single marker, it is the multiple markers which come to play their roles in the due course. Tribal ethnic movements find their expression in all forms, as discussed in the section 9.4 of this unit — insurgency, protection of the culture and economy of the “sons of the soil” from the outside exploiters, secession from the Union of India, autonomy movements/ demand for the separate state; and, ethnic conflicts and riots.

The most common issues which account for the tribals’ ethnic mobilisation are: perceived or real threat to their indigenous culture and economy including the natural resources like mineral, forest and modern market opportunities by the outsiders (non-tribals middle



classes, businessmen, moneylenders, bureaucrats); their discrimination by the state, especially at the central levels and its representatives (central government employees, army, police, etc.).

### **9.5.1 Who are Tribals?**

Unlike the Scheduled Castes, there are differences among the scholars on the criteria to identify the tribals or the Scheduled Tribes. While the Scheduled Castes consist of the erstwhile untouchable castes placed in the lowest rung of the Hindu society, the tribals follow multiple religions in the country – Buddhism, Christianity, Islam or their indigenous religions. However, there is almost a unanimity among the scholars on certain characteristics of the tribals. The principal of these characteristics are as follows:

- 1) Their close association with nature, mainly the forests;
- 2) Relatively traditional means of cultivation and less developed market;
- 3) Near absence of the rigid division within the community and discrimination on the basis of birth, unlike the caste division among the Hindus;
- 4) Presence of the traditional chiefs or headmen and better position of women as compared to the non-tribals;
- 5) Attachment/reverence to traditional customs and culture.

Article 342 of the Constitution attributes “isolation, backwardness and cultural distinctiveness” as the characteristics of the Scheduled Tribes.

These characteristics, however, have undergone changes as a result of modernisation – education, impact of Christianity on many tribes, changing cropping pattern or penetration of market, economic differentiation and emergence of middle classes and in some cases decline in the authority of the traditional chiefs. These changes have given rise to the ethnicisation of tribes reflected in their ethnic movements. Article 342 mentions 212 Scheduled Tribes in the country. The tribes are found in all parts of the country – all states of north-east India, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Dadra Nagar Haveli and Lakshdweep Islands. The tribals of north-east are called frontier tribes and those of other parts of the country are called non-frontier tribes. Of the entire tribal population 11 per cent are found in north-east India and 89 per cent are found in other regions. Tribals have been involved in the collective action for one or the other goals. (Ghanshyam Shah, pp.92-96).

### **9.5.2 Tribals of North-East India or the Frontier Tribes**

North-East India as a single region has the largest number of the tribal population in the country. They follow different religions especially Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and indigenous religious tenets. They can further be divided between the plain and hill tribes. Almost all state of North-East India have witnessed one or the other forms of ethnic movements. In this sub-section we will deal with some ethnic movements with examples from states of North-East India – Nagaland, Assam and Meghalaya.

It is important to note ethnic issues of North-East India are related to the geographical factors, its regional dimensions. Though there are differences among different tribals of North-East India in terms of their cultural practices, they share common experience of

deprivation due to their regional location. A large amount of literature exists on the North-East which seeks to explain the ethnic problems of the region. But there are wide differences in the discourse on explaining the ethnic issues of the region. And the divide in the discourse also reflect on the basis of the formation of the ethnic identities and the movements in the regions. The problems of the North-eastern region – insurgency, autonomy movements, ethnic conflicts, riots, etc., have been explained by mainly two perspectives: first, the modernisation/development/”nation-state building” perspective and; second, the “federation-building perspective”. The followers of the first perspective largely argue that the problems of the North-East are related to the issues of “nation-state building”; conflict between the new middle classes, especially among the tribals of the region, which has emerged as a result of the modernisation/development/transition (Democratisation) with the traditional leadership; inability of the system to meet the rising aspiration of this group. The main advocates of this perspective are S K Chaube, B P Singh, B G Verghese and Myron Wienor. Most of these writers do not hail from the region. The second perspective is actually the critique of the first one and is available in the writings of the scholars who hail from the region. The principal adherents of this perspective are Sanjib Baruah, Udyan Sharma, Sanjay Hazarika, Sajal Nag, M P Bezbaruah. They argue that problems of the North-East India arose because the nation leadership overlooked the perspective of the people of the region in their quest for “nation-building”. In order to build “nation-state” the central government adopted “step motherly” treatment towards the North-East; ignored the “periphery” and the smaller nationalities; shown arrogant attitude towards them; have been indifferent to the human rights violation in the region. They argue for a “Federation-Building” perspective in place on the “nation-state” building perspective. (Jagpal Singh (2005), “Challenge of Ethnicity to Federalism: Discourse on the North-East India” in Akhtar Majeed (ed.), *Federal India: A Design for Good Governance*, Centre for Federal Studies in association with Manak Publications, New Delhi). The need for a “Federation-building” perspective has been most prominently underlined by Sanjib Baruah in his books *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality* (Oxford University Press, 1999) and *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of North-East India* ( Oxford University Press, 2005). Let us now discuss some examples of Ethnic movements of tribals in North-East India.

### **The Nagas**

Movement of the Nagas which is often referred to as Naga insurgency is called the Naga national movement by the Nagas. It is the oldest movements relating to the ethnicity or the nationality question in the country. The nationality/ethnicity in Nagaland had all dimensions relating to the ethnic movement – demand for autonomy, secession from India and ethnic conflicts. Nagas believe that they form a nation which is different from other ethnic groups or nationalities/nations in India. They had always enjoyed their sovereignty with distinct culture, customs and history. A section among them believe that they have never been part of India and they would like to retain their identity, by joining Indian Union their sovereignty would be compromised. They do not recognise the merger of Nagaland with the Union of India and and consider it as done under coercion. That is why many Nagas did not recognise the Indian Constitution, the VI Schedule meant for the North-East India and participate in the first general election held in 1952.

The Nagas elite consisting of the those educated in the Christian educational institutions and few neighbouring village headmen formed Naga Club in 1918 to take up the social

and administrative problems of the people of Naga Hills. In a memorandum to the Simon Commission in 1929, the Naga Club pleaded to exclude the Nagas from the administrative reforms which it was supposed to recommend and retain the Nagas directly under the British administration. At the initiative of the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills District, District Tribal Council, an organisation of the individual Naga Councils was formed in 1945. In 1945, the name of the District Tribal Council was changed to the Naga National Council (NNC). The NNC reached an agreement on a 9-point programme with the representative of Government of India, the Governor of Assam, Sir Akbar Hydery on 27-29 June, 1947. The main provisions of the agreement included – protection of tribal land from alienation, creation of administrative autonomy and special responsibility of Government of India to implement the agreement. Asserting that Nagas are a separate nation from India, they announced formation of the Honkin Government or the “People’s Sovereign Republic of Nagaland”. This resulted in violence between the Indian Army and Nagas. This was followed by a 16-point agreement between the Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru and the Nagas in July 1960. This finally led to creation of Nagaland as a separate state on August 1, 1960, out of Assam of which it was a part.

It should be noted that there were differences among the Naga leadership over the issue of Nagaland as a separate state within the Union of India and Nagaland as a sovereign state/nation. The former founded Nagaland Nationalist Organisation (MNO) and the latter formed the Democratic Party of Nagaland. The MNO which was active in getting the Nagaland made a separate state were in favour of giving up the violence and accepting the Constitution of India. The question assumed a new dimension following the signing of Shillong Accord in 1975. According to it the Nagas accepted the Indian Constitution, deposited their arms to the Government of India, and in turn the government released Naga political prisoners and promised their rehabilitation.

The signing of Shillong Accord was not welcome by a section of the Nagas. The latter denounced the Accord for compromising their sovereignty and betraying Christianity. They now sought to mix the issue of Naga sovereignty with Mao’s ideology of socialism and formed National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) led by a Tangkhul Naga T. Muivah and Isak Swu. The NSCN leadership has guided the Naga movement while staying outside India. In their negotiations with the Government of India under the Prime Ministership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh they have raised two main issues – the issue of sovereignty of Nagaland and creation of a *Nagalim*, territory merging all areas of the North-Eastern states where Nagas stay. Apart from Nagaland, these states are Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. They argue that while creating the boundaries of various states, the Government of India merged the territories inhabited by the Nagas into different states. This divided them. They demand that the Nagas should be reunited into *Nagalim*. This demand has provoked opposition from these states. This has repercussion on the ethnic relations within these states. The Nagaland also has witnessed the ethnic riots and conflict between two major tribes of the state – Nagas and Kukis. The former allege that the latter are not the original inhabitants of the state, while the latter refute it.

### **Bodos of Assam**

The tribals of Assam – Bodos, Karbis and Adivasis have been involved in collective ethnic mobilisation since 1980s. The Bodos and Karbis are demanding creation of the

separate states respectively from within the present Assam. The Bodos and Karbis are the indigenous tribes inhabiting their respective habitats. The former are found in lower Assam districts like Kokhrajhar, and Karbis inhabit Karbi Anlong district of the state. The Adivasis consist of tribes like Oraons and Santhals who mainly immigrated to the state during the colonial period as tea plantation labourers principally from Orissa, Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. Apart from the working as the plantation labourers, they also cultivate land as poor peasants. The Adivasis demand protection of their rights in terms of reservation in the government jobs, protection from the dominant ethnic tribes as there have been several instances of violent ethnic riots between the Bodos and the Adivasis.

The tribals of Assam participated in the six year long Assam agitation led by the All Assam Students Union (AASU) from 1981 to 1985. The movement which was directed against the foreigners united major communities of Assam — tribals and non-tribal Assamese, on the common perception they shared common experience in terms of their belonging to a backward and discriminated state, facing the challenge of the foreign infiltration, especially from Bangladesh and Assam. In the course of time, however, the differences between Bengalis who had been living in the state since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and were the citizens of the country and the Bengladeshi immigrants got blurred. Led mainly by the students and the middle classes, the movement had become violent on a number of occasions. But as soon as AASU transformed itself into a political party – the Assom Gana Parishad (AGP) and formed the government following its victory in the 1985 assembly elections, the tribes like Bodos and Karbis which had participated in the AASU agitation started agitation for creation of their separate states. They felt that the AASU movement was led by the dominant communities of Assam utilised the support of the smaller tribes like them. Once the AASU signed Assam Accord with the government of India and formed AGP government in the state, the AASU leadership did not give due recognition to the smaller tribes like them and attempted to impose their cultural code on them. They asserted that they were different from the Assamese. Regarding this Sanjiv Baruah quotes a Bodo source saying “We Are Bodos, Not Assamese” in his book *India Against Itself* (Chapter 8). The new generation of leaders provides leadership to the Bodo movement. The All Bodo Student Union (ABSU) presented a 92-point Charter of demands to the government, which included demands for the recognition of their culture, language and providing opportunities for their educational and economic development. For achieving these demands they demand a separate state of Bodoland. It must be noted that like Karbis they also do not question of the sovereignty of the Indian state. Unlike ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) they want a separate state for them within the Union of India under the Constitution of India. They have resorted to violent means targeting the state agencies, especially those belonging to the central government and the armed forces. They have also directed their violence against the Adivasi immigrants, triggering of the ethnic violence. The government has responded by setting up Bodo Autonomous Councils to grant them local autonomy. But it has not responded to their demand for creation of separate state.

### **Tribes of Meghalaya**

Meghalaya has three main tribes – Khasis, Jaintias and Garos, who inhabit Khasi, Jaintian and Garo hills of the state. They are distinct for the existence matrilineal system which accords better position to women as compared to the patrilineal found among other communities of India. Like some other tribes of the North-East India, educated Christian

elite had already emerged among them in the state, especially the Khasis during the pre-Independence period. Shillong which remained capital for around a century of Assam, of which areas consisting present Meghalaya state were constituent, provided a suitable place for the growth of an elite section among them. The tribals of Meghalaya have been coexisting with non-tribals in Meghalaya, especially Shillong since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, following shifting of the capital of Assam from Cherrapunjee to there. The non-tribals who migrated into Shillong and other parts of Meghalaya since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century consist of mainly Bengalis, Biharis, Rajasthanis, Sikhs and till formation of Meghalaya as a separate state in 1972, the Assamese. The non-tribals despite their differences form a separate ethnic groups in the sense that their culture, features, customs, etc. are different from those of the tribals.

The 1960s witnessed the movement of the ethnic groups of areas of Assam, which later assumed the form of a separate state of Meghalaya, for creation of a separate. This movement saw the involvement of all ethnic groups – tribals and non-tribals of the region. It was their combined resentment against the language policy of the dominant group, the Assamese. They resisted against the language policy of Assamese government which sought to make the Assamese as a medium of instruction in schools and also an official language. This was seen as an imposition of the Assamese on the non-Assamese including the tribals and the non-tribals. Both set of ethnic groups – tribals and non-tribals jointly participated in the movement for creation of Meghalaya as a separate state.

The relations between the tribals and non-tribals of Meghalaya, however, underwent changes following the formation of the state in 1972. These were now marked by the ethnic divide. The state government in the state introduced land regulations prohibiting the transfer of land from the tribals to non-tribals, reserved seats in the legislative assembly for the tribals (56 out of 60 assembly seats for the tribals), reserved 85 per cent state government jobs for the tribals. This provoked reaction from the non-tribals of the state; who alleged that their contribution to the economy of the state was not recognised and they were being discriminated against. The views of the tribals are articulated specially by the organisations of women, students and politicians, most assertive among them being the Khasi Students Union (KSU) and the Federation of Khasi, Garo and Jaintia people (FKJGP). The KSU and other tribals representatives argue that due to the influx of the outsiders – the non-tribals, their cultural identity is eroded, economic opportunities are exploited. The central government symbolised by the army, central para-military forces is seen to be encroaching upon their rights. Therefore, the tribals of the state demand: the cancellation of trade licenses of the non-tribals, their removal from the state, increase in the reservation for the tribals in the state government jobs, etc. The KSU and other tribal organisations often raise these issues through pamphlets, in the rallies, newspapers, etc. The divide between the ethnic groups also resulted in ethnic riots on some occasion. Since the late 1990s the state has also seen the rise of some insurgent groups.

### **9.5.3 Tribals of Regions other than North-East India or the Non-Frontier Tribes**

The tribals of other regions than the North-East or the Frontier tribes of the states of Madhya Pradesh/Chhattishgarh, Bihar/Jharkhand, Gujarat, Rajasthan and several others



states have been mobilised on ethnic lines on several occasions. In modern history their revolt had been conspicuous against the intervention of the British authorities in the power of the tribal chiefs and against exploitation of their natural resources by the British and their collaborators such as the outside businessmen and bureaucrats or *dikus*. The tribal chiefs mobilised their fellow tribals in order to restore their power and resources and evoked their golden past in order to retain their ethnic identity and autonomy. The British administration retaliated against these movements with ruthless violence including assassination of the leaders of these movements. Birsa Munda revolt in Chhota Nagpur was among the most prominent of such movements during the pre-Independence period. Such movements have been termed as “millenarian movements” by K S Singh.

The issues which formed the basis of collective mobilisation of the non-frontiers tribals in the post-independence period have varied from state to state. These have included the movements for creation of separate states for the tribals out of the existing states like Jharkhand out of Bihar and Chhattisgarh from Madhya Pradesh or separate districts within the same state like demand by the Dang tribes for creation of a separate state within former Bombay state; against the encroachment of tribal land for the creation of dams resulting in the displacement like in the Narmada Valley. Some scholars have observed that during the 1990s the tribals have been mobilised by the Hindutva forces against the Christian and Muslim tribals in some states, especially Guajarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. This contributed to the division of the tribals on the communal basis (Shah, 2004; p.98).

The movement for autonomy expressed in the form of demands for separate states, districts out of present states or creation of autonomous administrative bodies are among the most commonly raised demands of the tribal movements. The basis for such demands are their grievances against the dominant for political formations: their cultural and linguistic identities are under the threat of erosion; their economic resources and opportunities are appropriated by others/outside; they are not given due recognition, etc. The tribal leadership, both traditional and modern, mobilises the tribals into collective actions. The acceptance of their demands depends on the political circumstances. But once a set of demands is accepted, the leadership looks for other issues. For example, after the creation of separate state of Jharkhand out of Bihar, the tribal leaders attempted to change the domicile laws. Similarly, after the creation of a separate state of Meghalaya, the tribal leadership introduced legislation changing the rules regarding inheritance and transfer of land. Thus, the ethnic mobilisation is a continuous process in a democracy.

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## 9.6 SUMMARY

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To sum up, mobilisation of the people on the basis of markers, real or imagined, which they share – language, religion, culture, customs, race, etc. into collective is called ethnic mobilisation. Ethnic communities in such situation relate and compare themselves to other ethnic communities and have grievances which they want to get resolved. Ethnic mobilisation finds expression in the form of self-determination movements – autonomy movements, cessation, insurgency or ethnic conflicts. The tribals of India have been involved in ethnic mobilisation for different purposes both before and after independence. They have taken recourse to both the violent and non-violent means. Success or failure of ethnic movements depend on political factors. Once one set of demands in ethnic mobilisation is accepted, in due course time on other demands the ethnic movements start. Thus, ethnic mobilisation is a continuous political process.



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## **9.7 EXERCISES**

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- 1) Explain the meaning of ethnic mobilisation and discuss the approaches to study it.
- 2) Give a general view of the ethnic mobilisation during the post-colonial period.
- 3) Discuss the general features of tribal ethnic movements in North-East India.
- 4) Write a note on the ethnic movements of the non-frontier tribes.

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## UNIT 10 WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

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### Structure

- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 The Colonial Context: The Vision of a New Society and the Reform Movement
  - 10.2.1 The Issue of Priority: Social or Political?
  - 10.2.2 Women's Issues During the Gandhian Era
- 10.3 The Post-Independence Period: State, Reform and Women
- 10.4 The Left and Women's Movements
- 10.5 Equality or Difference
- 10.6 New Social Movements
- 10.7 Summary
- 10.8 Exercises

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### 10.1 INTRODUCTION

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Like other social groups women also have been involved in collective actions equipped with their agenda, leadership, ideologies and organisations in order to have their proper and dignified place in all aspects of life. This unit deals with social movements of women. Women as individuals and as a group are among the most discriminated sections of world population. As a marker of this discrimination, societies across the world have shown preference for boy child. The preference for boy child has taken societies to the extent of killing girl child in the womb itself. All practices of discriminations in societies have been legitimised through either invoking socio-cultural needs or the need to maintain a lineage or for material production. The *patrilineality*, where descent is through father's lineage and *patrilocality* where the wife and children lives in father's home or village have added to the preference for the boy child. All these arrangements have the consequence of women being relegated to what Simon De Bouvoir so poignantly termed as the *Second Sex*.

As the *second sex* in material terms means that women is quite often denied political, economic and even cultural rights. She quite often does not have right to inherit property along with her male siblings. She does not have either equal access to education and health care equal to a male counterpart. She is also perennially in the danger of being the target of male violence within the family or outside. Historically religion, polity and society have been so organised as to make her position vulnerable to any discriminatory trends in the society. There have been protests and revolts by people including women to question such discriminating arrangements within the society. They, however, remained at the level of individual protest while the structure and power of patriarchy being so strong as to crush them or appropriate them easily into the existing arrangements. It is during the last two hundred years or so that the modern times have provided the space, ideas and principles of organisation to people to question as well as alter the arrangements by either aligning the women's protests with the parallel movements to change the society or by incorporating the basic digits of modernity into the women's movements. Nationalist movement in the colonial countries, socialist and communist movement and feminist movement across the world and the larger trend of democracy have been some

of the powerful streams that presented themselves as catalyst of change in this regard. In the increasingly globalising world women's issues and concerns are becoming increasingly part of the larger movements.

The relationship between women and social movements is quite intricate. First, one is not very clear as to where and how do women figure in the broad contour of different social movements. It has been found that women were merely part of the mobilised section of some movement whose overall objectives are detrimental to women's interests and concerns. For example, the fundamentalist movements across the globe have tended to circumscribe women's role as merely that of a mother or provider of children to the community as defined by the group. The glorification of a mythical German women by the Nazi ideology has its counterpart in many other groups. In fact, any move to give the rights of ownership of property, marriage etc., have remained in the domain of the personal and any change in that domain invites the wrath of the section of the fundamentalist groups. Any demand to take women's issues and rights away from community to the larger public domain has been opposed by the fundamentalist groups.

Second, related to the nature of social movement is: whether it allows the space for the articulation of issues and concerns regarding women. Indian national movement was one such movement whose democratic and secular character had given the space for many democratic movements to spring up and voice their concern. Women's movement in India is one such example where the contours of the movement coalesce with the mass phase of the Indian national movement. The notion of equality, idea of justice and democracy, central to the core of the movement of national liberation, were also the premises of the women's movement.

Historically, changing conditions of women and their status constituted the core of the social reform movement that began to take shape in the early decades of the nineteenth century. By the early decades of the twentieth century this core is enlarged by bringing two issues, i.e., equality of women in modern political, social and cultural realm, and women's role in the developmental process, into its ambit. Though the rapid changes in the society, economy and culture have led to rethinking on many issues, the social movements in the country more or less have directed their concerns about women along this core.

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## **10.2 THE COLONIAL CONTEXT: THE VISION OF A NEW SOCIETY AND THE REFORM MOVEMENT**

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In India, like in many other colonised countries, it was colonialism in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries that brought the new economic and political processes into operation. The coming of the British, the Christian Missionaries and their criticism of the Indian society presented a big challenge to the local intellectuals and social leaders. The former attacked the indigenous society and its treatment of women and the lower caste. It presented new organising principle, equality, or Christianity in some cases. It also brought blueprint for a new organising principle for the society. While colonialism as a system exploited the colonies and stunted its natural and potential growth, it brought, at the same time, the new ideas of democracy, idea of equality and justice.

The nineteenth century Hindu, Parsee, Muslim reformers took the challenge and first tried to reform their own societies in the face of such a massive criticism. Ram Mohan Roy, for example, while he attacked the missionaries for presenting distorted picture, was also preparing agitation against Sati and the customs of caste inequalities. In the later part of the century, reformers took the questioning of women's condition very prominently and all the major reform efforts aimed at ameliorating their conditions. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar made great efforts in getting widow remarriage society established. Similarly women's education too was thought to be one of the most important steps in this direction. Veereshlingam Pontulu, Jyotiaba Phule, Badruddin Tybaji, Dadabhai Naoroji all contributed greatly in this direction.

In the later part of the nineteenth century, when there was in some sense a reassertion of the racial and imperialist ideas, there were a movement among the Indians which tried and asserted its own historical superiority. In this line that they looked into the past to suggest that woman was in some sense better placed in those days than they were now. In this sense the problem of integrating women's question into the social movement become more intricate— if the situation became bad what should one do was the question that led to the major indicator of the movements' thrust. It was to the credit of the intelligentsia who fought the issue of social reform that the issue of women remained in the forefront. One of the most intensely fought issues was the between the social reformers and the those who separated the social issues from the political fight.

### **10.2.1 The Issue of Priority: Social or Political?**

What was the exact nature of women's issues and how should they be addressed? Should they be treated purely as question about social inequality or attitude or as part and parcel of larger political questions of equality, freedom and justice? These have been serious questions before the reformers as well as the political leaders since the nineteenth century. It should, however, be noted that except Phule most of the social reformers were concerned with social reforms among the high castes. The problems like widow remarriage and sati were not prevalent among the lower strata of society. And low castes in general irrespective of gender were deprived of education. To the early reformers this division did not present itself very sharply as people like Raja Rammohun Ray articulated women's cause as integral part of his overall vision for what we now referred to as a modern India. Those who began to mobilise opinion regarding the economy and issues related to the operation of the colonial system in the second half of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century were also concerned with the reforms in society and equality of men and a more just society for the women in a possible modern India. For them the issues of economy and politics were not dissociated. M.G. Ranade, Veereshlingam Pontulu, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Phirojshah Mehta, Dadabhai Naoroji , Badruddin Tyabji, Jyotiba Phule and many more actively campaigned for women's education and more public space. The symbol of this unity of perception was the fact that the annual conference of the Indian social conference used to meet at the Annual Congress session pandal itself. The question whether the social issue or the political issue is more important emerged by this time. The Congress realised that the differences of perceptions on social issues among different communities were given priority over the political issues, it would breach the unity of people while was essential in the national movement.

In ensuing debate between the social and political question, the idea of priority and the location of the principle of equality was very important. Those who opposed the social conference working anywhere close to the Indian National Congress, in fact, did not oppose the principle of equality. But the separation of the social question from the political turned out to be some way detrimental to the women's questions. The debate on the issue of Age of consent Bill which created an uproar in the 1890s saw that the progressive voices were opposed quite powerfully by sections which were not in favour of a legislation which was primarily a legislation in raising the marriageable age for women. The attempt to separate the two also impeded any serious theoretical debate on the ways and means to incorporate the women's issue in the movement for social equality.

### **10.2.2 Women's Issues During the Gandhian Era**

In the 1920s the Gandhian movements brought back a sense of unity on the women's question. Along with the question of untouchability, and Hindu Muslim question, women's condition also became a primary issue to be solved immediately. This has serious implications for the women's movement in general and the mobilisation of women's issues for the larger political context. The national movement now created the largest possible space for the women to come out and participate on an issue which was ostensibly political, i.e., political freedom. But at the same time the masses, including large number of women, were galvanised to raise their own groups' issues in the process of the movement. In 1927 All India Women's Association was formed as the national body giving voice to some of the issues. This was the time when we have voices from women as well as from other sections for giving women the voting rights as well as representation in any possible government formation. Interestingly, this was also the time that suffrage movement in Europe gained its momentum. Many of the women who were in forefront of the Gandhian movement later became involved in institutions all over the country. These institutions would play a major role in taking up serious social issues, and mobilising and leading movements in later years. In fact, the methods that Gandhi used in his struggle against the colonial state as well as in his movement against the untouchability and on the question of communal conflict became hallmark of some of the movements by women quite often inspired by these women and institutions. In the seventies when women fought in Uttaranchal against the liquor vendors or against the falling of trees, their movement was characterised by the Gandhian ways of protest-non violent and arousing the moral conscience in the opponent.

The success of Russian Revolution in 1970s encouraged a large number of women to join the communist movement in India, who were involved in the national movement and women's movements at the same time. In fact, the communist movement helped the later day progressive movement to take up issues related to women as well as women's position as the central political and social question. These communist women continued their legacy of women's movement in the post-independence period.

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## **10.3 THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD: STATE, REFORM AND WOMEN**

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The post-independent Indian state launched the array of reforms which had been demanded even before the independence. There were, for example, demands that all customary and

religious and traditional laws which regulated the larger Hindu society and which to a great extent therefore determined the legal status of the Hindu women in religious terms should be codified and brought into the public domain. In 1948 there were attempts to bring to the Constituent Assembly what is known as the Hindu code Bill. However, the stiff opposition led to the dropping of the idea. After a couple of other attempts, finally it was in 1955-56 that the Code Bill was passed in sections known as the Hindu Marriage Act, Hindu Succession Act, etc. In spite of the strong support from the Congress party under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru the opposition was very strong. The government could not enter into the issue of the personal laws of the other communities, i.e., Muslim, Christian or Parsees. Crucial aspects of their lives continued to be determined by the personal laws of their religious communities in which man was the supreme arbiter in most of the cases. This was an anomalous situation as women found to their chagrin that the community structures were more authoritarian and Indian state in that sense would be more of an agency of liberation from such structures

The post-independent Indian state geared itself to the consensus that modern developed state and the political democracy would be safeguarded by the economic democracy. Women got franchise – the democratic right and the development would see that she got the economic rights to practise that democracy. Thus a full blown theory of equality, rights and justice was in place.

It was the violence against women in the form of bride burning and rape that galvanised the women's movement led by the feminist groups especially since the 1970s. The campaign against dowry and rape are called the first campaigns of the contemporary Indian feminists movement. The violence against women at the ground level, rape by the landlords, caste oppression etc., made the movement gradually try and incorporate them into the concerns for women. The theoretical and organisational structures of the parties and the movement though highlighted some of the issues, did not develop any new perspective on them. This had set in motion a rapid disenchantment with the state apparatus. There began to be strong voices against the nature of the development and there were demand for more women-centric development in many parts of the country. In fact, several cases, for example, the Chipko movement in the Himalayas, became an eye opener where along with the saving of the trees there were demands for development planning which is sensitive to the local needs and resources.

These criticisms have been yoked into theoretical mode by the criticism of development process that India has been undergoing. The international feminists' criticism of the state sponsored development process which marked its decisive beginning in the seventies also influenced these works during the decade of the UN women's decade. A section of these intellectual critics though not directly coming from the feminists, began to uphold community, tradition and the local bonds as the counterpoint to the project of modernity which they argued was against women. Some fragments of Indian intellectual too joined in those critique. In the nineties these critique merged with sections of the feminists movement which was also waging a battle against the globalisation processes.

The post-independent Indian state is grounded on the idea of equity with justice and this has been the consensus developed during the freedom movement. The development was supposed to bring the equity closer and the democratic functioning of the system would see to it that the fruits of development would reach to the different segments of population. Regarding the issue of women, the consensus was on women's development. On the



equity front the legal system was found to be unequal and the one of the first major restructuring tried by the Constituent Assembly in 1948 itself was to try and effect a standardised Hindu code which would try to do away with a large number of discriminatory personal and customary rules applied to women in different Hindu communities. The ultimate conceived goal, as the Women's representative would argue, was to usher a common uniform civil code. This was thought to be very significant because the state continued to treat women through the personal or community laws where male was the dominant and authoritarian figure. It was argued that unless the rules, conventions and laws are brought out of the personal or community into the public domain women would not be able to enjoy the equality as promised by the constitution.

The Shah Bano affair brought an entire range of issues related to women to the fore. It brought the Indian state's attitude towards the issue of women in the context of her religious community. It also showed the weakness of the women's movement to mobilise its strength to fight for a common civil code. Thirdly, it brought the weakness of the progressive sections in the society to come forward and demand uniform civil code for all the communities so that the women's rights come out of the domain of religion into the secular legal domain. The Indian government's act in some sense weakened the liberals within the Muslim community and the voice of the educated women who found at this point of time the strength of the orthodoxy vis a vis the state.

The Governments' act also emboldened the fundamentalist groups in other communities who could now on show that Indian state appeases the minority community sentiments and not concerned about development really. From Now it is the fundamentalist and communal groups among the Hindus which started demanding uniform civil code to provoke the minority. Thus in sum, one of the most important issues concerning women's equality became part of the real politics of the Indian democracy. By the eighties the political movements by communal parties which had a large middle and lower class support gradually affected the original discourse on women and her legal and political entitlements.

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## **10.4 THE LEFT AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS**

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The communist parties, since 1950s, not only provided women leadership but also kept the women's question in the centre of political discussion. However, with the split in the communist movements in 1964 and emergence of many new voices within the left movement which questioned old assumptions of the Marxist parties, new ideas and organisational principles to articulate demands of communities and groups began to emerge. The Shahada movement, in Dhulia district of Maharashtra was one such movement. The exploitation of the local Bhil tribal landless labourers by the non-tribal local landowners was the key issue in this. To add to the woes of the tribals came the successive drought and famine in Maharashtra. Different exploitative practices of the landowners and the moneylenders pushed the tribals to take extreme steps of protest. Though the movement had its origin in the late sixties through the traditional folk ways, singing bhajans etc., the seventies saw a complete metamorphosis when the newly inspired left leadership joined the movement and Bhil women were mobilised gradually and in large number. However, in the course of the movement it was realised that the issues that were central to women in these area was not exactly what the organisation

had initially thought out as such. For example, after the agitation began in Shahada movement that it was realised that most of the women were landless wage earners and the demand for higher wages would address the women's issue more directly. The movement gradually shifted to cover issues such as higher wages and anti-alcoholism because it was found that the husband's habit of having liquor eats into the domestic economy and women had to struggle more to keep the household going. Alcoholism also led to regular wife beating. Issues such as these which earlier were not part of the concerns of the movement came to be realised as intimate reality of the women's life and were taken up. This encouraged women too to come out in larger number to join the groups by women formed and went from village to village destroying liquor pots.

In the 1970 again, the Maharashtra agitation soon spread to Gujarat where the women in major cities like Bombay, Poona and Ahmedabad came out in streets protesting against the government for such a situation. It happened in the background of economic worsening conditions of the people following Bangladesh War. In Bombay, for example, Socialist Mrinal Gore and Communist Ahilya Rangnekar led the movement. The Maharashtra and Gujarat agitation gradually added to the larger oppositional politics that was being galvanised around this time. In fact, in Gujarat and Maharashtra, the lower classes were conspicuous by their absence. Hence, the issues and concerns of the women from the lower classes or the tribals had not become part of the movement. It was soon through different sets of movements that this section began to voice its concerns. In Maharashtra, for example the tribal women in the Shahada movement brought the issues of landless wage earning women and the perils of alcoholism while on the other hand in Bodh Gaya the issue of land was involved. One realised that after a gap of a decade or so the political and social questions were rapidly becoming closely involved

The arrival of the new classes into the picture meant that the political landscape would have become more complex and sharper questions to resolve. Gandhian ideas of femininity and role of female were now questioned and so were the symbols used by him. It is in such a situation that the mobilisation of the women too began to take place. This was also the time that when the western feminists began to raise the questions whether the issues that they have been fighting for really applied to the third world women as there are doubly suppressive, patriarchy and poverty. The same situation prevailed in India when the issues that were raised by the women movement either under the rubric of equality or right really applied to the women of different social strata. It is vividly portrayed in the experience of the Shahada movement when in the course of the movement the organisers came across the differential issues and changes the demand and mobilisation patterns land rights issues which even the recent feminist writers have shown to be the most important issues – where most of the population is without land. The issue of who would give land to them brings us back to the issue of the state and also the democracy that obtains in India

The year 1975 was declared as the world women's year by the United Nations. The Women's decade, 1975-85, witnessed women related activism by feminist groups as well as political parties. These were primarily urban-based activist groups. It was however the state which was promoter of many progressive steps for ameliorating women's condition and saw a large number of activities. Maharashtra was hotbed of the left inspired women's activism. The Maoist inspired women organised the *Purogami Stree Sangathan* (Progressive Women's Association), and *Stri Mukti Sangathan* in Bombay.

Conferences of women were organised in Poona by the *Lal Nishan Party* and the *Shramik Sangathan*, both Maoist Organisations, which were attended by a large number of women from across party lines and from across the state.

It was also during this time that dalit movement and the feminism got linked. A *Mahila Samata Sainik Dal* too was formed by some dalit groups in Maharashtra. The Maoist groups and the dalit organisations gradually provide a new edge to the argument that religion and caste system provide additional legitimacy to the oppression of women and hence have to be attacked for any possible women's liberation.

The new phase also came with a new consciousness. How should women be organised and represented? While movements like *Shahada* showed that women could be organised in the process of the movement in which issues, close to women's lives, would emerge. A self conscious feminist stream also came to assert by now. While most of the feminists were drawn from the urban middle classes and were seen to be unable to represent the whole of the women of the society, there were serious thinking that there need to be organisation outside the movements. These groups, referred to as autonomous groups, could think about women's issues and the movement without falling prey to the organisational hierarchy and blinded by the assumptions that have plagued the left parties of the country. Many women's groups that originated during and after seventies decided to keep themselves *women only* group without any party affiliation or traditional organisational structure and quite often structured around one or few serious issues relating to the day to day life and struggle of the women in Indian society. By 2000 we have thousands of such groups working in different parts of the country and in fact the Indian women's movement by 2000 is characterised more by these groups across the country than by the organisationally structured movement as such.

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## 10.5 EQUALITY OR DIFFERENCE

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While the entire edifice of the social movement in India, which wanted to change the status of women, has been raised on the principle of equality, by the eighties there were realisation that even equality was not enough to protect women from being victims of violence perpetrated on her solely because she happened to be a woman. This was in spite of the fact that in many cases she was equal or superior to the male perpetrator in status, education or other indicators. Women were the target of rape simply because she was women – biologically different from Man. It soon became a major theoretical as well as organisational point of debate as to where should the movements place their focus, i.e., on equality or difference. The case of the rape of a tribal girl Mathura in 1987 by the police and despite a campaign and fought by many prominent legal personalities, the judiciary was unmoved and declared Mathura a women of easy virtue. This created uproar and made the women's group realise the insensitivity that the state apparatus has on women's issues. Similarly, the dowry deaths primarily among the affluent middle class households too was a shattering blow to some of the earlier held assumptions, i.e., the development process by raising the status of the women would help her practice her democratic rights fully. The same development was now seen to be capable of making life unsafe for her. By the time the census of 2001 was published, the increasing decline in the sex ratio in the most developed states of India pointed to the same phenomenon.

It was also realised that while it has been pursuing the developmental agenda ostensibly for the betterment of women, the state at times was amenable to the forces of patriarchy. This had further implications. Thus, the feminists and women activists have come to accept that movement for democratisation has to be strengthened so as to strengthen the force behind the demand for better and safer daily lives of women. The need for a strong women's movement got further underlined in the age of globalisation where new forces of violence were unleashed on women.

Issues of not only women's right in a democratic system but also the question of overall equality in a situation when the state is withdrawing is not merely a crucial political issues that the women's movement has to solve.

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## 10.6 NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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By the late eighties the overall scenario in India and the world created situation where the women's movement could not remain outside the domain of the issues that have led to the world wide movement regarding ecology, environment and issues of sustainability in the face of the a new globalising economy. Very soon we have movements in different parts of the country, which have voiced the concerns of the day-to-day life and survival in the face of the new forces of economy and politics. While the national politics seems to retreat into the caste and community and costly and corrupt electoral practices, a large number of movements from different parts of the country saw the coming of people from the local communities and villages. One of the chief characteristics of these movements has been the prominent role including that of the leadership being played by women. Survival and dignity seems to have become the twin issues, which these movements have infused to the already existing issues of equality and justice. Participation of a large number of women in the movement for the rights of labour and the tribals in Chhattisgarh by the *Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha*, in the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* and the agitation against the authorities in Bhanwari Devi case where the authorities were trying the shield the oppressors, and recently in the agitation for rights to information has shown that the social movements have been trying to fuse the issues of politics and society at a larger canvass and convert them into struggles for a more democratic and just society. Interestingly enough, a careful perusal of the voices from these movements would show that women in these movements have often questioned the validity of the representative nature of our democracy. While they have tried to forge alliances with similar movements across the country and even the world, they have, at the same time, demanded from the state to change its electoral system to have more participation from the women. All these were taking place quite close to the time when a large number of new forces were getting unleashed on the ground without adequately preparing the population for it. The women, without the adequate even elementary education and primary health care facilities, had to face these forces. There were also indications that the state, which till now declared that it would take care of the vulnerable sections, has began to waver and withdraw.

It is these circumstances that one found women in the forefront of many of the new movements. The results of these new mobilisations is that the woman found herself face to face with extremely powerful combination of patriarchal structures entrenched within the state apparatus. In Meghalaya and Kashmir, for example, it is the state legislatures which tried to debar women from any inheritance, if she marries outside the religiously

or otherwise defined community boundaries. This was an attempted check on women's right to take decisions on her own on crucial issues such as on choosing her own partner. In a world, caste, community and state boundaries have been brought to suppress the mobility of the women.

The Women's movement in the meantime also tried to fight against the structures of community and tradition as they have been found quite often to be impediments in the way to equality and freedom. This was evident in the case of two powerful movements in the 1980s, one against the issue of dowry and another in the famous case of Roop Kunwar in which the latter was being burnt as Sati. In cases of the dowry deaths tradition has been forwarded where as in the latter case a young Rajput lady was made to die along with her husband. The opposition by feminist and other groups of the Sati and its later glorification was countered by the powerful combination of the caste and community politics which defended not only the act of sati but also those who forced Roop Kunwar to the funeral pyre. However, in the process there were awareness of the new forces both which supported the women's cause of equality and those opposed came face to face and was an educating for the Women's movement.

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## **10.7 SUMMARY**

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To sum up, like several other social groups Indian women also have been involved in social movements before and after independence. Placed in the discriminatory position in all aspects of society undergoing multiple sufferings the women, and their problems became a matter of concern of the social reformers in the pre-independence. In the post-independence period a large number of grass-root organisations and civil society organisations, organisations of different ideological persuasions took up the women's issues. Though women's issues have occupied significant place in the agenda of policy makers, they are still neglected on the whole.

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## **10.8 EXERCISES**

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- 1) Write a note on the issues of women in the pre-independence period.
- 2) Explain with some examples the mobilisation of women by the leftist forces.
- 3) Explain the role of state regarding women's issues.



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## UNIT 11 REGIONAL MOVEMENTS

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### Structure

- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Regional Movement: Meaning and Significance
- 11.3 Methodological Insights on Regional Movements
- 11.4 Regional Movements, Regionalism and State Formation: Some Causative Explanation
- 11.5 Salient Patterns of Movements for Statehood
- 11.6 Types of Regionalism
- 11.7 State's Response to Regional Movements
- 11.8 Summary
- 11.9 Exercises

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### 11.1 INTRODUCTION

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As India consists of a large number of regions with diverse social and cultural compositions and different levels development of economy and infrastructure it has been facing regional movements since it became independent. The Reorganisation of the states in India in 1956 did not solve problems related to regional disparities. Even after the formation of a particular state, a region or more within a state start regional movements for autonomy, independence or even secession from the union of India. This units seeks to familiarise the union of India. This units seeks to familiarise the students with the regional movements and issues related to them.

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### 11.2 REGIONAL MOVEMENT: MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE

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Regional movement is an identity movement seeking special privileges, protection, and concessions from the state. It is a movement for regional self-governance. In other words, it means a movement for state formation — a movement seeking pluralisation and federalisation of existing polity and political process. There are two potential and significant causes of the emergence of regional movement — one is the interregional or intercommunity conflict, and other is the conflict between region and the state. Interregional conflict is usually shaped around *insider-outsider complex* — a complex that nurtures nativism and son-of-the-soil ideology. This, in other words, means a natural claim of the insider for better and preferential treatment by the state, particularly in terms of resource distribution and reservation of jobs for the locals. Anti-migrant movement in Assam, and tribal-nontribal conflict over domicile issue in Jharkhand are some of the important examples of son-of-soil ideology. Interregional conflict also occurs over 'regional pride' rooted in culture, language and traditions. Regional pride is extended further in the event of boarder dispute and sharing of river water. In such a situation extent and meaning of 'region' and regional movement expand to take the form of state regionalism. This is very much evident from recent conflict between Karnataka and Tamilnadu over sharing of Cauvery water, or boarder dispute between Maharashtra and Karnataka, or the most recent conflict between Biharis and Assamese over the competitive examination for central services, or the '*Mumbaikar*' call of the

Shiv Sena restricting and preventing non-Marathis from occupying important positions in the business, economy and polity of Maharashtra. It is probably the reason that some scholars consider regional movement as consequence of developmental tension between society and polity.

On the other hand, region-state conflict usually takes place in the institutional structure of state system, wherein a region questions the distributive policy of the state as discriminatory, exploitative and unfavourable to the overall well-being of the concerned regional community. It is from this perceived sense of deprivation, neglect and 'internal colonialism' that the people of a particular region organise themselves into a movement seeking in most of the cases separation from the existing state, or in select instances settling with some autonomy arrangements within the same state. Here, it may be contextually mentioned that in the federal-plural process of nation and state-building, it is the high degree of democratisation and competitive political mobilisation, which generally transform a territorially concentrated sociocultural group into a self-conscious political community, questioning the hegemony of dominant group (other regional community) in state apparatuses and policies, particularly those affecting its identity structure and developmental needs. Viewed in this perspective, regional movement appears to be non-centralist and self-determining and defining ideology of protest against hegemony of state power and dominant regional group.

We can now possibly define regional movement as a movement for autonomy of identity and autonomy of development. Its objectives may be accommodative, protectionist, welfarist, autonomist, separatist and secessionist. Secessionism, however, seems to be merely a tactical strategy to pressurise the government. Once their genuine grievances are redressed they settle down within the constitutionally propounded democratic structure of Indian nationalism. There are numerous examples to support this submission, ranging from Tamil separatism to Akali movement (read religious nationalism of Sikhs), Gorkhaland movement, Bodoland movement, etc. A close scrutiny of their demands would suggest that they seek a redefinition of state-society relationship in such a manner that accommodates their identity demands and takes due care of their socio-economic requirement. And to serve this purpose, they usually aspire for a constitutionally documented institutional space of their own where their choices are self-determined. Thus, it is the 'protectionist self' around which politics of regional movement revolves.

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### 11.3 METHODOLOGICAL INSIGHTS ON REGIONAL MOVEMENTS

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Regional movements, especially in a diverse society like India, have contextualised formations. Therefore, it requires a componential analysis of the complex interplay of *region*, *people* and the *state*. When we say regional movement, it immediately refers to the existence of a regional community with political overtone. In more than one sense regional community is different from other social communities. In fact, region may consist of many social communities, which through a highly complex process of nation formation constitute themselves into a distinct regional community. Regional community is generally formed on the basis of identity of affinity and interests. "It is a community more in terms of 'horizontal comradeship' than the uniformity or homogeneity scaling vertically (AK Singh, "Sub Regions and State formation in India"). It is complementariness of interest and identity that help people to constitute and to imagine as a separate

regional community. But, is how a regional community formed? What are those subjective and objective factors, which constitute a group into distinct regional political community? Componential analysis also helps us in analysing the success, failure and sustenance of a regional movement. It further helps us in examining the nature and potential impact of regional movement on the process of federal nation-building. It is commonly held that more subjectively the identity is grounded, more intense is the regional movement. It is in this context that the theories of nationalism or nation and nationality formation assume critical significance in understanding the phenomena of regional identity formation and its transformation into a movement. Here, it is also worthwhile to consider the similarity and difference between nationalism and regionalism. Regionalism and nationalism are symbiotically linked. Both undergo similar process of construction and formation. They tend to serve their respective social constituencies as an ideology. They share similar analytical concern as to how identity is formed, and when an identity becomes politically salient. Only difference between them is while the nationalism is generally centralising; regionalism, on the contrary, is inherently decentralising. It is possibly the reason that regional movement also emerges as a reaction to nationalism.

In the literatures on nationalism, we find two principally important, but dichotomous accounts of nation-formation: *perennialist-primordialist*; and, *modernist*. Primordialist considers identity as pre-given entity of distinct races, ethnicity, language, culture, religion etc. These individual attributes of identity are called the objective markers of identity. Any one or combination of them constitutes a distinct national or sub-national community, which when politicised become a distinct nation. Thus for them, nation is a politicised ethno-cultural community, extended in history and deeply rooted in socio-cultural traditions. Since such a community is historically embedded, it is territorially persistent as well. In other words, a community in order to be effective must also have a cultural homeland. Thus region in this context refers to a socially structured territorial space whose ecology and economy have deep impact on the making of a distinct and visible common identity of the people living in that region. Two regions cannot be culturally similar. Their geo-specifics do vary from each other even though they share in common many zonal characteristics. It is this fusion of identity and territory that makes regional community a self-determining community. It is this fusion which also rationalises their claims to autonomy. Interestingly in India, a regional community may and may not have pre-given bond of ethnies and culture. As the studies on the construction of Uttarakhandi and Jharkhandi identities have shown, it is the distinctiveness of regional economy and ecology that created first an 'interest community', which over the years of cohabitation succeeded in creating a common cultural bond. Social making of India further suggests that every form of identity and its objective markers have carved out distinct territory for itself. This we referred to as identity zone(s). In India, culture, language, religion, ethnicity, social traditions have assumed regional characteristics. It is probably the reason that we find performative variation in the observance of religious practices and caste idioms from region to region. Another interesting fact about the regions in India is that most of them had some form of administrative identity in the past when people and territory structurally - institutionally enmeshed with each other to give region a particular cultural trait and easily recognisable patterned behavior of the people. Historical-cultural region has had evolved communicative signs and symbols which in some cases led to the growth of an independent language or dialect. What emerges from this account of region-formation is the fact that regional community may be constituted on the basis of pre-give identity, or it may be constructed afterwards

which in the process of modernisation and development gets consolidated further as community of common material interests and destiny.

But how a regional community translates itself into a sub-national movement? To find an explainable answer, we have to take into consideration the methodological submission of the modernisation or mobilisation theory of nation formation. There are two crucial submissions of this theory: (i) conversion of community into a movement is a process of mobilisation by elite, intelligentsia and leaders; and (ii) in order to provide further dynamics and cohesion to community consciousness, identity is reinvented and relocated in the contextual present. This may require contextual reconstruction and reinterpretation of identity-contents of a regional community. But who does this? It is the elite who selects symbols (usually from distinctive ethnic and cultural past), and standardises them for larger group cohesion. The elite in the competitive setting of liberal constitutionalism politically mobilises the given identity. In other words, it is the state, which provides a setting in which identity crystallises and movement emerges. The state itself becomes a critical site of identity contestations and a breeding ground for sub-national or regional movement to emerge. Writing perceptively about India, Myron Weiner observes: “The process of identity formation is a complex one with several key elements. One element is the *institutional structure*, which shapes the framework within which group identities are maintained and intensified. The federal system, the structure of political parties, the educational system, and media serve to reinforce some identities while undermining others. A second element can be described as *reactive mechanisms*. Group identities are often formed or reinforced when challenged by others. The challenge may come as a consequence of assimilative pressures, migration, economic competition, or political threats. A third element can be described as *policy feedbacks*. Government policies in the form of entitlements and reservations induce groups to organise for political action, which in turn intensifies group identities. A fourth element is the underlying *cultural conception* of the state’s relationship to group identities. Here the issue is whether society is seen as subordinate to the state...or whether society is viewed as autonomous.

Regional identity is also formed, what Marxist scholar Hobsbawm writes about nation, “at the point of intersection of politics, technology and social transformation”. Modern means of communication and technological advancement create, intentionally or unintentionally, a collective self of the people, who organise themselves into a movement for getting fair, if not preferential, deal in the dispersal of national power and resources. Technology creates, to use Benedict Anderson hypothesis, an ‘imagined community’ - community which has the affinity of boundary, beyond which other imagined community exists. Had not the print capitalism arrived, the imagined community of nation would not have been formed. In other words, identity is facilitated by modernisation and development. Amidst the above contested account of identity formation, David Miller probably provides the best possible working definition of community (read regional community) as “(1) constituted by shared belief and mutual commitment, (2) extended in history, (3) active in character, (4) connected to a particular territory, and (5) marked off from other communities by its distinct public culture...”. Thus in any academic exercise on regional movement, it is the dynamics of ‘self’ and ‘others’ that need to be examined and analysed. Self-others dichotomy needs to be further situated in the politics of modernisation and development. If modernisation structurally differentiates pre-given identity and seeks to supplement it with new structure of secular identity, it also, on the

other, provides identity the necessary technological gadgets to recreate and reinvent itself. If post-modernity theory is to be believed, then identity never lapses, it only finds new medium and new language in the modernisation process. Identity universalises itself through medium of mass communication. People re-search and re-draw its ethnic past and situate it contemporarily.

From the above discussion, we may now select some crucial variables, which may help us in analysing regional identity and regional movements in India. One of them is federalism. Its working in India has shown some inherent contradiction. As we know, federalism is essentially decentralising. It is a political programme of institutionalising autonomy of society and polity. It is expected to accommodate regionalism within the framework of a federal nationalism. But on the contrary, its working took a centralising turn where regionalism was not only misplaced but at one point of time was also characterised as antithetical to Indian nationalism, its unity and integrity. Thus federalism instead of patterning regionalism served centrally the Union. As a consequence, most of the regional movements have critically questioned the constitutional scheme of distribution of federal powers between the region and centre. Dravida movement in Tamil Nadu, Akali movement in Punjab, N T Rama Rao's political propagation of 'Telugu pride' and other similar movements critically questioned the legitimacy of central powers and downsizing of their sub-nationalism or regionalism. As mentioned above, regional movement is organised in reaction to certain state policies, which a regional community finds disadvantageous to its interests. Thus one has to also take into consideration the policy framework of the state — both central and regional. Societal and regional equations of governmental policies have catalytic impact on the formation and initiation of a regional movement. Initially, the promotion of Hindi nationalism at the cost of other languages (regional and local dialects) created a fertile base for linguistic sub-nationalism to emerge.

Another important variable is the party system and party structure. The key question to be examined is the coalitional and accommodative capacity of the party system. The hypothesis that can be put forth here is that less coalitional a national party and party system, more intense is the possibility of regional parties to be formed and movement to be organised. In this context of crucial importance is the leadership pattern and representational structure particularly of the national and state level parties. Many a times, leaders with considerable public understanding organise a party of his own with defined enclaves of regional support and core social constituency. Such a party usually survives on the ideology of regionalism or sub-nationalism. This holds true with most of the smaller parties of Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and Northeastern states. Interestingly in India regional parties have come into being through a process of division and split in the national and state level parties. However, there are parties like Assom Gana Parishad, which came into being through the process of regional movement itself. Regional parties unleash regionalisation process in the national political order with a view to have participatory control over such decisions, which affect their identity and development. In any case, regional parties have two important roles — (i) identity retention, protection and articulation, and (ii) mobilising people into a movement in the event of conflict between nation and region, and between regions. However, a caveat here may be added, party and party system is an important factor, but not a necessary prerequisite for regional movement to emerge. Regional movement may be autonomous and independent of parties and party system. Transient small group of intellectuals and elite may shape



movement. We should also not forget the fact that social and regional movements do follow the rules of spontaneity and subalterneity. Regional movement is generally self-processed and shaped in the structural dynamics of 'self' and 'others'. Thus for any substantive formation of knowledge on regional movements, one has to essentially understand the complex dynamics of 'self' and 'others' through a measured analysis of inter-regional relations (or conflict), state policies, instruments and institutions of political mobilisation, impact of technology on identity formation, role of mass media, and the structural analysis of national and regional conflict which generate group conflict.

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## **11.4 REGIONAL MOVEMENTS, REGIONALISM AND STATE FORMATION: SOME CAUSATIVE EXPLANATION**

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India has been territorially reorganised into 28 states and 7 union territories. Out of this, we have today as many as 31 demands for statehood and sub-autonomy arrangements. They are: Maru Pradesh in Rajasthan; Bundelkhand, Poorvanchal, Bhojpur and Harit Pradesh or Jatland in the Uttar Pradesh; Vindhya Pradesh, Baghelkhand, Rewanchal, Madhya Bharat, Mahakosal, Malwa in Madhya Pradesh; Mithila in Bihar; Saurashtra in Gujarat; Konkan, Vidarbha and Marathwada in Maharashtra; Telengana in Andhra Pradesh; Coorg, Kodagu and Sagari Prant in Karnataka; Kosal Rajya in Orissa; Gorkhaland and Kamtapuri in West Bengal; autonomy demands of Jammu and Ladakh regions in Jammu and Kashmir; Bodoland, Karbi-Anglong, and Poorbanchal in Assam; Kukiland in Nagaland; Garoland in Meghalaya; and Hmar state in Mizoram. Movements for these states are in different stages of mobilisation. Some of them are strong and persistent, others are dormant but occasionally reiterative. What we need to examine here is why there exist so many demands for separate states? Do the present states lack requisite homogeneity of population and administration?

From close analysis of the official practice of state formation it appears that these demands exist because of the non-congruence between cultural boundary and administrative boundary. In many cases, the present states appear to be invented ones, which has unsuccessfully attempted to create common linguistic, administrative and political identity among the people living within the different regions of the state. Even if the invented state has succeeded in creating new pan-state identity, people have not relegated their pre-given ethnic-regional ties to the backyards in order to live with this *new* identity. In fact, people of India live with many identities, but this never means the replacement of one identity with other, or the assimilation of many into one. Co-living with many identities is possible only through inter-connectivity between them. But when this inter-connectivity is either missing, or attempt is made to supplement the pre-given ethnic regional identity with invented official (state) identity the problem of legitimacy begins. This is one among many dimensions of regional movements in India. Interestingly in the nine states of Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Tripura, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Goa, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, we do not find any dislocation between cultural boundary and administrative boundary of the state. Therefore, there does not exist any significant movement for statehood.

In the six major and large states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, there alone exist 16 major demands for statehood. Further, in three officially designated Hindi-states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh there are as many as eleven demands or movements for separate statehood. The

very existence of these demands itself questions the legitimacy of these states being Hindi-States, and their artificial constructedness. In other words, region and state are non-congruent. To explain further, in the ethnically homogeneous states like Punjab, Tamil Nadu etc. it is the culturally constructed 'We' that permeates different geographical divisions of the state. In this type of states, 'ethnie' is coterminous with 'territory'; therefore, we are having least (or for all practical purposes 'no') movement for separate statehood. While the ethnic states cultivate on the basis of pre-given identity, the ecologically distinctive states like Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranachal, Jharkhand and other hill states are having ecologically shaped, constructed and locally ingrained identity. It is the relative congruence of 'interests', 'destiny' and 'folk-affinity' that makes an ecologically distinctive state/region a cohesive political and administrative entity within the Indian federation.

On the other hand, in the composite — plural states such as West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, the similar congruence of affinity and interests lacks between the state and people of different regions. Coalescing together many distinct and mutually varying sub-regional identities within one dominant language like Hindi, Bengali, Rajasthani, Gujarati, Marathi, Telegu and Kannada have formed these states. It was believed that these languages would, in due course of time, succeed in creating a broad regional-state identity across the people and sub-regions of these states. But, these languages have not been able to create a sense of 'imagined communities' among two people living within two different sub-regions of a state. Bihar for example lacks requisite homogeneity of population, culture, language, geography, politics and economics. This delegitimises the relevance of state for serving the identific and development requirements of the people of Mithila region. This holds true with most of the above listed composite plural states.

What has been stressed above is the fact that though the principle of dominant language may help to create an '*imaginary state*', it fails to create an '*imagined community*'. Therefore, today we have demands and movements for the separate states of Mithila, Bhojpur, Braj, Bundelkhand, etc. Given their historicity of identity, administration and exclusivity of development, these sub-regions are potential claimants of separate states. Similarly, Bengali bhadralok identity has not been able to hold together the ethnic Nepalese in the Darjeeling hills, and Rajbonshis in north Bengal demanding a separate state in five districts of Cooch Bihar, Jalpaiguri, parts of Darjeeling and north and south Denajpur. Another classic example of language not creating an imagined community is the demand for a separate Telengana state in Andhra Pradesh. The people of Telengana cherish their history and tradition of cultural synthesis as their identity, instead of Telegu language.

The sub-regional identity assumes distinct political identity when factor of 'internal colonialism' generates and promotes inter-regional disparities and discrimination. This phenomenon has two dimensions: one, many of the sub-regions, despite being rich in natural resources have remained economically underdeveloped either because of the sheer neglect of their development by the state in which they currently are, or, ill-conceived top-down approach of development; second, survival of one region at the cost of other region through resources and earnings transfers. This is what rationalises the demands for separate states of Vidarbha, Marathwada and Konkan (in Maharashtra), Telengana (in Andhra Pradesh), Saurashtra (in Gujarat) and Kodagu (in Karnataka),

There is another dimension of it. If demand for Harit Pradesh in western Uttar Pradesh is any pointer, then it can safely be argued that an economically well-off region may seek separate statehood in order to retain its status as developed or developing economy.

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## 11.5 SALIENT PATTERNS OF MOVEMENTS FOR STATEHOOD

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From above discussion, following salient patterns of regional movements seeking separate state may be discerned:

- i) In India, territory and community are symbiotically linked. A region is known by the community, which lives in it, and community is designated and characterised by the geo-specifics of the given region. The demand for separate statehood arises from the synthesis between the two – community and geography. A territorial community seeks separate state in order to be the sole arbiter of its cultural setting, political making and economic wellbeing of the people and territory, which it *claims* as ‘homeland’. For them the state formation means creating an institutional-political space through which ‘autonomous self’ of the society is not only expressed, but preserved, protected and promoted.
- ii) People having distinct socio-cultural identity, concentrated in few contiguous districts within the existing state-systems seek a separate state in order to preserve, protect and promote their identity. It is argued that a separate state would provide them a political identity and a constitutionally documented institutional space for interest articulation and protection within the Indian nation. It is being contested that this would enhance their capacity to bargain with the central authority (union government) as well as with other states in the overall distribution of political power and economic resources. This, in other words, means capacity endowment, which otherwise is not possible within the existing state in which they currently are. The cases of Uttarakhand and Jharkhand movements are important pointers in this regard. There is (was) a perceived threat to their identity due to the existence of ‘internal colonialism’, expansionism and hegemony of certain other regional or cultural groups. This also holds specifically true with most of the sub-regional movements in the north-eastern parts of India. They further argue that a separate state would ensure them of a self-assuring mode of economic development through better application and exploitation of local resources, talents and skills.
- iii) Some of the above mentioned regional movements seek constitutional recognition, protection and legitimisation of their respective socio-cultural varieties by the state. It is at this level that the demand for functional elevation of mother tongue to the level of education and administration is made. This also includes inclusion of some languages in the eighth schedule of the Constitution of India. Linguistic purism is another facet of socio-cultural regionalism. This in other words means preservation of cultural identity. Identity factor is extended to delimit state’s encroachment upon the cultural space of a particular regional community. Cultural homogenisation by the state on the pretext of having a uniform national cultural identity is opposed. Therefore, most of the regional movements emphasise autonomy especially in the socio-cultural realm. And for exercising autonomy of identity, a separate state is legitimately demanded. A separate state, in this context, is perceived as congenial political space through which ‘self’ of identity is preserved, protected and promoted.

This further means delimiting the areas of influence and interference by the state (central and regional states) in the exclusive 'self' of the society. This requires periodic restructuring of state-society relationships, especially in terms of the cultural rights of the people and their subsequent obligation to a broader territorial state. Arguably, state's role is perceived in promotional terms, and not those of interference. And such a state-society relationship is sought to be provided a statutory basis in order to avoid encroachment by any other structures of governance.

- iv) Located within the realms of identity and development, regionalism for sub-regional groups serves as an ideology through which they seek to define their own administrative and political identity; and, their relationships with broader territorial state, regional state, and inter-community relationships. Regionalism provides them a bargaining space in the overall process of nationalism and federalism. It acts as countervailing force to centralisation, and allows polity and society to federal. It stresses for a decentralist framework of national unity, nation and state-building, and governance. Being an autonomist ideology, its two fold objectives are (i) maintenance of (sub) regional identity; and, (ii) self-devised and sustained mode of economic growth. These two objectives are best achieved, as regionalists claim, when they are granted the separate statehood or other structural-institutional mechanism of self-rule. In India, as Akhtar Majeed observes, "despite occasional and remote indications of potential secessionism, regional movements do not usually go beyond claiming resource sharing within the broader national context. Regionalism, in this sense, can politically be understood as a" search for an intermediate control system between the centre and periphery for the competitive advantage in the national arena".

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## 11.6 TYPES OF REGIONALISM

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Iqbal Narain has identified three major types of regionalism (or regional movements) in India (i) Supra-State regionalism; (ii) Inter-State regionalism; (iii) Intra-State regionalism. Supra-state regionalism is built around the issues of common interest in which group of states form a common political alliance, directed against either the similar alliance of other states or the Union. Supra state regionalism is issue specific and is, as Narain writes, "confined to certain matter on which the group would like to take a common and joint stand. It is not at all a case of a total and permanent merger of state identities in the group identity; in fact, rivalries, tensions and even conflicts continue to take place at times even simultaneously with group postures *south vs. north* in India on such issues as language or the location of steel plants illustrate the point". Compared to this, inter-state regionalism, as he further observes, "is coterminous with state boundaries and involves juxtaposing of one or more state identities against another on specific issues, which threaten their interest. River water in general and...boarder dispute in particular can be cited as example." On the other hand, a regional community against the state in which they are situated spearheads intra-state regionalism. Intra-state regionalism is aimed at assuring oneself of self-identity and self-development. This 'self' gradually becomes weak when we move onto other two forms of regionalism. In the case of intra-state regionalism, it is identity around which group's political and economic interests are defined. But in other two cases, it is conflict of interests either between two states or between the centre and the state which temporarily give the people a sense of togetherness, and a common political outlook. But, the essence of regionalism always

remains the same in all the category of regionalism. As a political idiom regionalism seeks federalisation-pluralisation of national identity and resources. In other words, it is an ideology of territorialising the process of federal nation-building. It is probably the reason that regionalism has been described as 'in-built' tendency of nationalism and federalism. It is a "complex amalgam of geographical, historico-cultural, economic, politico-administrative and psychic factors". What factors will assume ascendancy in the making of a regional movement is difficult to say. However, regional movement in any case will always seek a redefinition of the relationship between a regional and national on a more substantive basis.

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## 11.7 STATE'S RESPONSE TO REGIONAL MOVEMENTS

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State's response to regional movements has been varying. We do not find any consistent policy in this regard. However, certain patterns and principles can be discerned in this regard. They are: (i) secessionist demand could not be conceded, rather, secessionism would be suppressed by all necessary means; (ii) central government would not concede those regional demands based exclusively upon religious differences; and (iii) the demands for the creation of separate linguistic would not be conceded unless such a demand is socially wide and economically viable. To illustrate, there could not be any singular construct or formation of the units of Indian federation. Units should be composite ones. Such a composite unit could be formed only by mutual balancing of four principles which the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) underlined as: "(i) preservation and strengthening of the unity and security of India; (ii) linguistic and cultural homogeneity; (iii) financial, economic and administrative considerations; and (iv) successful working of the national plan." Other factors like 'peoples' wishes', 'historicity of the region', and 'geographical contiguity' could have only limited, but qualificatory application while (re) drawing the boundary of the units of the Indian Union. Thus, wishes of the people can be acceptable as one of the yardsticks of territorial readjustment only when it is objectively ascertainable, and is subjected to the overall considerations of other important factors like "human and material resources of the areas claiming statehood, the wishes of substantial minorities, the essential requirements of the Indian Constitution and the larger national interests." Similarly, historicity of a region can be invoked only to the extent of determining the connectedness of the people with claimed territory, but it could not be stretched to an extent as to convert them into a separate nation. Though geographical contiguity is of high value in determining and devising the boundary of a state, "it [however] does not necessarily imply or involve the need for a geographical frontier....". Thus, while drawing the lines between two units, the primary concern as the SRC underlined should be of ensuring compactness of the units.

Within the above totalistic approach to reorganisation, the Commission strongly recommended for the creation of large states. "This, however", as Commission writes, "does not mean that units should be so unwieldy as to be without any intrinsic life of their own or to defeat the very purpose for which larger units are suggested, i.e., administrative efficiency and coordination of economic development and welfare activity." Thus, in the opinion of the Commission, the size principle must be balanced with viability principle. This, in other words, means that the region seeking separate statehood must have "adequate financial resources to maintain itself and to develop its economy". Though, Commission upheld the principle of internal homogeneity purely from the viewpoints of smooth functioning of administration, it, nonetheless, rejected the



monolingual and uni-cultural construction of state. It is precisely the reason that it rejected the 'homeland concept' and 'one language one state' formula for the reorganisation of the units of Indian federation. However, within the general principle of sizeable — composite state, a cultural group can have its own state when they do qualify the following two fold criteria: "(a) the people claiming a distinctive culture must constitute a recognisable group; that is to say, it should include a number of persons sufficient by themselves to claim, conserve and develop stable traditions or the characteristics of their culture; and (b) such cultural individuality should be capable of being expressed in terms of a defined and sizeable geographical entity." However, such a cultural basis of states' reorganisation should not impede the inter-mingling of two cultures and overall growth of composite national culture. What appears from above is, that every recognisable and dominant basis of states' reorganisation must be subjected to the test of maintenance of national unity and integrity, and national security.

On the basis of SRC's recommendation, the Government of India passed in November 1956, the State Reorganisation Act. The Act endorsed the bulk of the recommendations of SRC, except the merger of Hyderabad state into Andhra Pradesh, and Vidarbha was made part of the Bombay state. Thus, the number of states was reduced from 16 to 14 in this Act. However, the number of centrally administered territories was enhanced from 3 to 6. The major inclusion was the Himachal Pradesh and Tripura. Since then, the numbers of states have been increased to 28 and union territories to 7. States formed since 1956 include: Gujarat (1960), Nagaland (1963), Haryana (1966), Punjab (1966) Himachal Pradesh (1971), Manipur (1972), Meghalaya (1972), Tripura (1972), Sikkim (1975), Arunachal Pradesh (1987), Mizoram (1987) and Goa (1987). Jharkhand (2000), Uttaranchal (2000) and Chattisgarh (2000).

With the formation of three new states of Uttranchal, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, reorganisations have been effected for the first time in the Hindi-heartland of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. As stated above, the reorganisation was first effected in 1956 in the south. It moved down to north-west in 1966 and north-east in 1971 and 1987. In all these reorganisations, the basis of reorganisation also differs. The first reorganisation was done predominantly on the basis of language. In north-west in 1966, linguistic principle was combined with religious identity. Initially, this seemed to be a perilous combination having stronger tendency of drifting towards separatism. However, democracy has its own way to prevent separatism and promote integration. In the third major reorganisation affecting mostly the north-eastern region, tribal affiliations and distinctive ethnic features became the major basis of reorganisation. The formation of three new states, in all probabilities, may have 'domino affect' on the Hindi- heartland and other composite-plural and large sized states. Reorganisation in these states may not be purely ethnic or cultural, but it may be on the basis of 'economic specificity' and 'ecological-cultural distinctiveness'. Cultural specificity may in some case, as in the movement for Mithilanchal state, owe to language or dialect, but in no case it would owe exclusively to religion or ethnicity. In fact, most of the sub-regions of composite-plural states have developed and articulated a composite-cultural identity.

With initial reluctance, the Government of India is now applying the provisions of the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Indian Constitution with intended objective of containing ethnic separatism and tribal alienation in different regions, particularly in the northeast. Institutionally, the government seems to be receptive to the creation of autonomous

regional council or district councils for the people of ethnic enclaves, which otherwise may not qualify for separate state. Regional council is an experiment in the community governance, wherein the concerned regional community has powers to regulate its identity and developmental. Similarly, the state language policy is now being fine-tuned to accommodate the claims of various dialect or language groups. The government has embarked on two fold policies — one, to include the major languages in Eighth Schedule, and two, granting official recognition to culturally significant languages of the state as language of education and official transaction. All these policies have significant impact on integrating diverse regional community within the mould and measures of Indian nationalism. We find a positive change in the official attitude towards regionalism and regional movement. Government can concede ethnic claims of self-governance within the permissible autonomy framework of Indian Constitution. Now regionalism is very much integral to the process of nationalism and federalism. In fact the constitution of India itself recognises the notion of an autonomous region. It is with the extension of cultural autonomy, and initiation of democratic process with officially earmarked economic package of development that India has been able to contain ethnic separatism, and making regionalism ultimately the part and parcel of national life.

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## **11.8 SUMMARY**

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To sum up, regional movements are indicative of the identity movements of people in a particular region or state, which seek special privileges, protection and concessions from the state. There are both imaginary and real reasons for the rise and growth of these movements. Ever since India became independent, regional movements have taken in different parts of the country on one or the other basis – territorial, ethnicity or economic backwardness of the agitating areas. The response of the state to regional movements has not been uniform. Depending on the situation the state has been indifferent, accommodative or coercive to such movements. Since regional movements are related to the socio-cultural and political processes, these are an ongoing phenomenon in a democratic country like India.

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## **11.9 EXERCISES**

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- 1) Explain the meaning and significance of regional movements.
- 2) Discuss the methodology to study regional movements.
- 3) Explain the reasons for the rise and growth of regional movements in India.
- 4) Write a note on the response of the state to the regional movements.

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## UNIT 12 RELIGIOUS AND COMMUNAL MOVEMENTS

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### Structure

- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 What is Communal?
- 12.3 Communal and Religious Movements in Retrospect
- 12.4 Religious Demography
- 12.5 Hindu Communal and Religious Movements
  - 12.5.1 Hinduisation and Pedagogic Inculcations
  - 12.5.2 Rise of the VHP and the Issue of Conversion
  - 12.5.3 Babri Masjid-Ram Janm Bhumi Issue
- 12.6 Islamic Religious and Communal Movements
  - 12.6.1 Religio-lingual Issues
  - 12.6.2 Communal and Terrorist Activities and Use of Islam
- 12.7 Christian Religious and Social Movements
- 12.8 Sikh Religion and Communal Movements
- 12.9 Summary
- 12.10 Exercises

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### 12.1 INTRODUCTION

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Religious and communal movements have been the glaring feature of Indian sub-continent in general and India in particular. Whether it is an issue of social reforms, issue of national awakening, formation of a state or coming to power, the religion has played a decisive role in shaping the destiny of this country and its people. Social movements of varied nature have played an important role in different spheres of life, primarily relating to religion. In South Asia in general and India in Particular, the religious fundamentalist movements have been pivotal in bringing about the socio-political change. Their influence could be inferred from the fact that even they have been successful in drawing the boundaries of nation state and are constant in such efforts by leading secessionist moments. In addition to this, many of them are quite radical since they even demand a structural change in the system itself from a secular state to a state based on a particular religion. Consequently, such movements indulge in promoting enmity, hostility and violence amongst people of different religions, which raises the question about their legitimacy in the public domain. But in reality, the extent of penetration within the society and linkages with state politics these movements can not be simply dismissed, particularly in the present day India. This unit deals with social movements in India with a focus on movements related to communal frenzies which have marred the community life of the people of India on religious lines.

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### 12.2 WHAT IS COMMUNAL?

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In both political parlance and academic discussion, the ‘communal’ is used in a derogatory sense representing narrow sectarian interests. In pre-independence India, political leaders described the Indian Muslim League a communal organisation. However, for many Marxist and European scholars it represented Muslim nationalism. And in 1946

overwhelming majority of Indian Muslims voted for the Muslim Home Land in the belief that the creation of Pakistan would fulfil Muslim nationalist aspirations in the sub-continent.

Here it is worth pointing out that Communal identities can be formed on territorial, cultural, ethnic, or religious bases or on a combination of these all too, depending upon the emotional intensity that the people attach to a particular aspect of a nation. Both Hindus and Muslims have been mobilised on communal lines. India is not only their motherland, it is also their sacred land. What they claim that it is the land of their saints and sages; it is where their sacred rivers flow and where their history was created and they have full claim over their territory. In order to achieve geographical unity, places of pilgrimage located in the four corners of the country are often cited and refuge is sought in creating common cultural and religious bonds among the Hindus despite their regional and linguistic differences.

Hindu nationalists emphasise this common cultural and religious bond creating an emotional attachment to this land and its people. The anti-Sikh riots following Indira Gandhi's assassination, the Bhagalpur massacres in 1989, the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992, attacks on missionaries in late nineties and the havoc caused due to the communal riots after the incidence of Godra in 2002 are some of the manifestations of majoritarian communal movements organised on religious lines.

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## **12.3 COMMUNAL AND RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN RETROSPECT**

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The seeds of communalism on religious lines were sown in the early British period. The 'divide and rule policy' followed by the British Government was largely responsible for the communal hatred amongst the different communities in India. In the census they categorised people according to religion and viewed and treated them as different from each other. They tried to decipher the Indian communities on the knowledge of basic religious texts and they found intrinsic differences in them instead of the way they coexisted in the present. The British remained fearful of the potential threat from the Muslims, who were the former rulers of the subcontinent, ruling India for over 300 years under the Mughal Empire. In order to win them over to their side, the British helped establish the M.A.O. College at Aligarh and supported the All-India Muslim Conference, both of which became the forerunner institutions from which leaders of the Muslim League and the ideology of Pakistan emerged. The social reformer and educator, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, who founded M.A.O. College, taught the Muslims that education and cooperation with the British was vital for their survival in the society. Tied to all the movements of Muslim revival was the opposition to assimilation and submergence in Hindu society. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was also the first to conceive of a separate Muslim homeland. The idea of the separateness of Muslims in India was built into the electoral process of India following the introduction of separate electorate which culminated in ideological schism between the Muslims and the Hindus in time to come. While there were strong feelings of nationalism in India against the British, by the late 19th century there were also communal conflicts and movements in the country that were based on religious communities rather than class or region.

Along with Muslim communalism, Hindu communal sentiments were also fanned on the issues of 'cow slaughter', conversion by Christians and Muslims. Shuddhi Movement was launched to reconvert the Hindus, who embraced Islam or Christianity, by the Hindu revivalists like Arya Samaj and other Hindu orthodox organisations. The dissention between the two communities also arose on account of language and its script, as Hindus wanted to change the official script from the Persian to the Hindu Devanagiri script, effectively making Hindi rather than Urdu the main candidate for the national language.

In response to the formation of Muslim League, Hindu Right Wing political movements also started getting organised on political lines in full swing in the form of Hindu Mahasabha and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in the beginning quarter of twentieth century, claiming for a unified Hindu-Rashtra.

The political ideology, formed on the religious sentiments, could not keep together the communities living in this sub-continent, despite strong secular nationalist sentiments reflected during the freedom struggle. The independence of India accompanied its partition on communal lines, though India altogether discarded the formation of state on religious or communal sentiments and declared itself a secular state. However, as the religious values and sentiments were integral to Indian society at large, they kept on echoing the hearts of masses in one or the other issues raised on religious lines.

Despite, having accepted the partition on communal lines the majority-minority syndromes remained intact. Numbers of Muslims inhabiting India are the same as in Pakistan making it one of the largest Muslim countries of the world. To further understand the gravity of the situation on account of its religious multiplicity where communal movements are still able to disturb the social harmony, it would be desirable to have an insight into the demographic composition as pointed out by the census of 2001.

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## **12.4 RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY**

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The country has a total area of approximately 1.3 million square miles and a population of slightly more than one billion. According to the latest government estimates, Hindus constitute 82 per cent of the population, Muslims 12 per cent, Christians 2.3 per cent, Sikhs 2.0 percent, and others, including Buddhists, Jains, Parsis (Zoroastrians), Jews and Baha'is, less than 2 per cent. It is difficult to define Hinduism as Hindus worship many Gods and Goddesses, and rituals also vary from region to region and caste to caste. Slightly more than 90 per cent of Muslims are Sunni; the rest are Shia. Buddhists include followers of the Mahayana and Hinayana schools and there are both Catholic and Protestant Christians. Tribal groups (members of indigenous groups historically outside the caste system), which in government statistics generally are included among Hindus, often practice traditional indigenous religions. Hindus and Muslims are spread throughout the country, although large Muslim populations are found in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala, and Muslims are a majority in Jammu and Kashmir. Christian concentrations are found in the North-Eastern states, as well as in the southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Goa. Three small North-Eastern states have large Christian majorities—Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya. Sikhs are a majority in the state of Punjab. In the last half century or so, many lower caste Hindus, Dalits (called as 'Scheduled Castes') and other

non-Hindu tribal groups have converted to other faiths because they viewed conversion as a means to escape widespread discrimination and achieve higher social status.

According to the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India, there are approximately 1,100 registered foreign missionaries in the country representing a variety of Christian denominations which are often engaged in conversion and other social services.

With such a vast and diverse religious configuration and having the history of rich religious origins, it is but natural that people of this land are bound to get influenced in their public or private activities by religious sentiments. In order to assert their religious identity in social and political life, all the communities have tried to woo the masses by raising emotive issues more often resulting in destructive tendencies, affecting the nation building process and causing embitterment in the social harmony.

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## **12.5 HINDU COMMUNAL AND RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS**

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As discussed earlier, Hindu revivalists movements during the 19th century prepared the ground for right wing politics along which religious issues took the shape of Hindu communalism. The issues of conversion, ban on cow slaughter, implementation of Hindi, Hinduisation of education and asserting the claim of Hindu homeland remained vibrant even after independence. Adding further to the communal frenzy, the issues like, Uniform Civil Code, removal of Article 370 (related to Kashmir), demolition of Babri Masjid (a historical mosque) and construction of Ram Temple on the same place and subsequent attacks on Christian missionaries on account of their policy of proselytisation, remained the bone of contention on which Hindu right wing social movements thrived and tried to enchant the masses.

The issues based on identities of religion, caste and ethnicity have overshadowed the social and political processes after independence. The diversity on ascriptive denominations, on which the religious communal movements were based, attempted social transformation whereby a homogeneous polity could be established or at least, the dominance of the majority community be asserted and other religious groups are reduced to just the status of foreigners.

The Hindu Mahasabha, which was the major political force before independence and which spoke for the cause of Hindus, diminished because of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination and umbrella like domination of Indian National Congress. After independence the other Hindu outfits were also put to the test of time and got little recognition in independent India because of the ugly face of communal violence which killed millions and displaced around 15 Million people across the border. The brutal assassination of Mahatma was the single event at the time of Independence which made people indifferent towards religious sentiments in the public life.

However, the RSS continued to penetrate the masses through its social service projects and resuscitated the Hindu national spirit through a large network of tens and thousands of shakhas, engaged in its multifarious Seva projects undertaken by its various sub-organisations in the field of student, labour, farming, education and in especially Vanavasi areas.



### 12.5.1 Hinduisation of Pedagogic Inculcations

The socio-economic and cultural reforms, which the RSS undertook after independence, were extensive and got a wide ranging recognition amongst the Indian masses. The RSS, in order to achieve its objectives, stroked at the roots of mass inertia. It sought to alter the social formation through pedagogic programmes, voluntary social work during natural calamities and repeated assertion for the Hindu-Rashtra for Hindus.

In line with other social reformist movements like the Arya Samaj or the Ramakrishna Mission, the RSS started its agenda of penetration through wide ranging educational institutions which inculcated pedagogic programmes on traditional Hindu lines. To this effect, the RSS started the first Saraswati Shishu Mandir in 1952 in Gorakhpur (Uttar Pradesh).

As the number of schools grew in different states, an all-India co-ordinating body called Vidya Bharati was set up with its headquarters in Delhi. The Vidya Bharati educational mission was founded with the objective of training children to see themselves as protectors of a Hindu nation.

The RSS practices may be seen as a reaction to the widespread Christian missionary educational practices. In their efforts to revive past culture, Sanskrit terms are used to address teachers (*Acharya*), the practice of touching their feet as a mark of respect and the naming of classrooms after Hindu sages (*'Vashisht kaksh'*, *'Vishwamitra kaksh'*), also marks out the school as a space where Hindu *Dharma* and Hindu *Sanskars* are asserted with pride, where tradition is saved and transmitted as against the 'enculturation' or 'influence of Christianity' through convent missionaries.

Not only this, to further propagate its identity of Hindu culture, the Vidya Bharati schools celebrate their own roster of special days, such as the birthdays of Shivaji and Jijabai, Vivekananda, Deendayal Upadhyay and Savarkar. Significantly, Gandhi Jayanti is not celebrated. *Shikshak diwas* or Teachers' day (celebrated by the rest of India on September 5th on the birth anniversary of the former president and educationist Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan) is celebrated on the supposed birth anniversary of the Sage Vyasa, while Krishna Janmashtami stands for children's day, normally celebrated in India on Nehru's birthday, November 14th. Myth and history, the birth and death anniversaries of actual historical figures and those of mythical characters are, thus, glorified in the child's consciousness through the aura of annual holidays, celebrations, morning prayers as well as through the content of history and cultural knowledge of text-books. The functioning of the school is primarily to keep a religious identity alive in the minds of children at the outset.

The RSS/BJP has attempted to affect a radical departure in the existing educational ethos through the use of both state power by packing state educational institutions with its own ideologues and the instruments of 'civil society', where it created its own network of schools in order to feed the well-developed cadre structure of its organisations.

Inevitably, the RSS's educational and political agenda included both: absorbing sub-altern groups into the Hindu fold to fight against 'minorities' and using violence against these same groups in order to perpetuate Hindu dominance in the existing social order. In order to justify and make their inculcations logical, the Sangh Parivar took recourse to re-write historical developments which shaped the destiny of India.

### 12.5.2 Rise of the VHP and the Issue of Conversion

The process of religious conversion has evoked grave concerns amongst the members of the Sangh Parivar down the century which were intensified and made to appear much more legitimate by giving the loss a 'patriotic' and 'national' colour. This phenomenon has been a key to the functioning of Hindu majoritarianism particularly after 1947. The Sangh Parivar's justifications of recent outrages against Christians are in consonance with the instances of such an equation.

It is widely assumed that Hinduism is unique among religious traditions in being non-proselytising. Conversion to other faiths, therefore, is a loss that cannot be recovered. This logic at once echoes at the hearts of most of the individuals. The common sense, which is applied here, is that one can become a Hindu by birth alone since caste (whether in the *Varna* or the *Jati* sense) is crucial to Hinduism and caste status is hereditary.

From the late 19th century onwards as the expansion directed towards marginal groups and tribals became more organised, 'reclamation', *Shuddhi* (purification), 'reconversion' (*Parivartan*, 'turning back'—the term preferred by the VHP today) became more rampant. All these terms have been coined to bring people back to their 'natural' state, presuming that all the targeted groups are Hindu in a more or less Sanskritised manner.

If we analyse the functioning of the Jana Sangh in early days, along with the promotion of highly Sanskritised Hindi and cow-protection, the fight against Christian missionaries was made an important plank of its activities. The Jan Sangh organised an Anti-Foreign Missionary Week in Madhya Pradesh in November 1954.

Till the recent anti-Christian campaign, the VHP, which has been associated primarily with *Ramjanmabhumi* and the onslaught on Muslims at the time of its foundation in 1964 and in the subsequent decade, its main focus had been directed primarily against Christian proselytisation in tribal areas (the North-East, Madhya Pradesh, and South Bihar). The *Achaar Samhita* (code of conduct) drawn up by the VHP in 1968 included *Parivartan* (turning back, i.e. reconversion) among the basic *Samskaras* of the Hinduism. Here it is worth pointing out that this kind of *Parivartan* was different from its historically referred movement of *Shuddhi*, which was more reformatory and social in context, but this kind of efforts were more communal in their approach and had essentially conservative motives. The Meenakshipuram (Tirunelveli) mass conversions of thousands of Dalits to Islam in February, 1981 inaugurated an era in which Muslims were targeted for more than a decade. In the recent times Christians have been on their agenda especially after the formation of the BJP-led coalition in centre.

In addition to Pokhran blasts and swiftly accelerated 'liberalisation', the BJP-dominated coalition at centre may be remembered for the concerted campaign against Christians. The widespread revulsion evoked by the sheer horror of the Staines' killings on 23 January 1999 seemed to have produced a brief lull but then the attacks started again and came to be more and more widely distributed. By August 2000 they had spread to a very big part of the country: Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra, Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Goa. A recent Christian estimate places the number of recorded attacks since 1998 at 184, while there have been 35 incidents in the first six months of 2000 alone.

### 12.5.3 Babri Masjid-Ramjanm Bhoomi Issue

The resurgent spirit of Hindu communal assertion finally found a historic expression in the Ayodhya movement which Shri Girilal Jain described as the most significant event after Independence. The RSS holds the view that Ayodhya, Mathura and Kashi is not a political but a national question.

This issue further aggravated the situation. The events between 1986-92 have an interesting account to present. Though the controversy of *Ramjanm Bhoomi* has more than a century old history, yet it remained within the four walls of Ayodhya. Even on 28 December 1949 when riots broke out due to the sudden installation of *Ram Lalla's* idol over-night, the incidence could not gain much heat as the doors of the Mosque were swiftly closed for both the communities and place was kept under guard in status quo till 1985 when Rajeev Gandhi ordered the opening the Gate of controvertial Babri Masjid for Pooja by the Hindus. Adding to this, the Doordarshan serial—*Ramayana* further acted as a catalyst to this controversy. The Sangh Parivar used the actors of the serial for gaining support in the elections of 1989. The campaign was launched from the district of Faizabad in which the town of Ayodhya was located, symbolising the strong urge for a Hindu assertion.

Even Rajeev Gandhi wanted to capitalise on this issue, though in a subtle manner. He tacitly allowed the foundation stone for the proposed Ram Temple to be laid adjacent to the Mosque. Rajeev Gandhi did not hesitate to refer to this incident being similar to Mahatma Gandhi's dream for *Ram Rajya*. However, those involved directly with the movement were the real beneficiaries. The VHP was confident that the *Babri Mosque* controversy would split every party vertically. These gestures of the VHP came true to a greater extent as the BJP's electoral gains were considerable. In the 1984 parliamentary elections it had won barely two seats with 7.5 per cent votes but in 1989 it won 85 seats with 11.5 per cent of votes. Gains of the BJP were significant and unprecedented in its history since the days of the BJS. This success was attributed to its ability to project its separate identity from other parties. From this point onwards, the BJP became more vocal about its Hindu identity. The Ayodhya movement led to the demolition of Babri Mosque on 6 December 1992.

Despite its repeated threats after 1992, the VHP and other Hindu outfits have largely refrained from taking direct confrontation with the State. Now they have moderated their agenda, i.e. settling the issue through court, though there have been oscillations of their anger in repeated threats to the state time and again.

In March 2003, the VHP announced it would launch a nationwide campaign to 'reclaim' 30,000 Hindu temples that had been converted into mosques. Some Muslims fear that under this campaign, Hindus will try to claim the Gyan Vapi mosque in Varanasi, the Idgah mosque in Mathura, and the Ram temple grounds at the former Babri Mosque in Ayodhya.

The VHP continued its trident of 'trishul' distribution programme during the reporting period despite the prohibition under the Penal Code against the distribution of sharp weapons to the public. Trishuls (three-pronged tridents) are Hindu religious symbols, but they have also been used as weapons, including in the 2002 Gujarat riots.

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## 12.6 ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS AND COMMUNAL MOVEMENTS

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Islam is one of the largest minority faiths in India and is perceived by Sangh Parivar as actively engaging a pan-Islamic ideology in order to recover the past glory, and constantly is the cause of the Hindu sense of insecurity.

Along with Hindu religious and social movements in the 19th century, the rising tide of Muslim politics was quite visible in the first quarter of 20th century particularly after the formation of All India Muslim League in 1906. The Muslim communalism, like other right wing organisations started acquiring colour on religio-political lines and inhibited the integration and assimilation of Muslim community in Indian society. Aligarh Muslim University fuelled the fire by giving communal colour to issues like Urdu language and separate electorates for Muslims and steadily accelerated the movement for communal politics in the name of religious brotherhood. Events like Khilafat Movement, Mopla riot in Kerala, propaganda of two-nation theory, demand for Pakistan and finally the partition of the country were the outcome of such politics fanned on religious lines.

Even after the formation of secular India, the demands for maintaining exclusive identity remained consistent. The concept of religious brotherhood was put to use for this purpose. The cry for 'Islam is in danger' caught the imaginary concept of Muslim brotherhood or the religious solidarity of the Muslims, which formed the main ingredient of Muslim politics in India. Some of the Muslim scholars have rightly pointed out this divisive communal design of the feudal section in the community. "It would seem that, in the sub-continent, Muhammad's concept of 'Umma Muslima' (Muslim Community as a homogeneous unit) is only successful in politics and as a defensive posture".

The slogan of religious brotherhood remained the main weapon for the political fight of Muslims even in post-partition India. The social elite of Muslim society also exploited the spiritual concept of Islamic brotherhood only to expand the autonomous space for Muslim politics in the country. Elitist character of Muslim politics failed to comprehend and work on the economic and social problems of Indian Muslims. Repeated slogans for a separate religious identity were basically for a separate political identity of the Muslims, which is contrary to the spirit of joint electorate system enforced in India after partition.

Such efforts to homogenise a religious group in the plurality of Indian society widened the centuries old communal mistrust between the two major religious communities of this country. The Muslim leaders, while taking advantage of the secular constitution, persisted with its divisive concept of religious solidarity, which implied communal unity in the name of minority privileges. The attempt for social integration was resisted upon under the garb of old cry of 'Islam in danger'. Consequently, self-assertion of Muslim brotherhood on communal lines pushed the Muslim community into mental and psychological ghettos.

A. Q. Ansari, a prominent Congress leader, established a Muslim Front inside the Congress, demanding that Congress party should give election tickets to Muslims on the basis of their population. Keeping the Muslim masses ignorant of the realities of modern age, their leaders continue to arouse the sentiments of internal religious unity for

maintaining a distinct communal identity. What exactly was the concept of Muslim brotherhood meant in a larger space of democracy, always remained an unanswered question. Against whom they want communal solidarity is a big question mark for even the Muslim thinkers.

### **12.6.1 Religio-lingual Issues**

Along with the demand for separate electorate, the Urdu Language has also acquired religious colour. Muslims, irrespective of their region and Mother tongue, have constantly raised the issue of Urdu as a part of their religio-cultural heritage.

It is a general perception of the Muslims in India that Urdu can and will survive in India as a functional language only through its inclusion in the educational curriculum as a Modern Indian Language, which is the mother-tongue of more than 60 million Indians. However, due to the negligent attitude of the so called secularists and Hindu right wing ideologues, Urdu is losing its glory. Here, they generally forget that even rich language like Sanskrit could not survive despite having achieved State protection.

No one denies the glare of Urdu as one of the fabulous languages of India but here, people belonging to Islamic faith should not claim for its monopoly over this lingua franca which is even spoken by those who do not subscribe to this faith. The kind of communal colour which associates with this language, Urdu has become largely confined to Muslim minority educational institutions and religious seminaries called Madrasas. Though it has survived, yet the learners now belong to the lower strata of the Muslim community which is not only economically backward but socially fragmented too, which consequently renders it as one of the educationally backward and deprived communities in the country. Thus, the religious aspect has come to define the horizons of Urdu due to the denial of state support or rather the denial of the constitutional rights of the Urdu-speaking community. It is this situation which has misdirected the post-independence discourse on Urdu. To some extent, the preservation of Urdu is linked to the economic survival of the backward sections of the Muslim community since the Muslim elite of North India has altogether abandoned the language. No doubt Urdu is the repository of the religious heritage of Muslim Indians yet, as a spoken language, it is still lingua franca of common man of India.

### **12.6.2 Communal and Terrorist Activities and Use of Islam**

Apart from these issues which have largely dominated the mind set of Muslim population of India to a larger extent, the Islamisation of communal violence, separatism and terrorism have too come up as the special feature of religious communalism of Muslims in India, especially in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Government officially banned the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) in September 2001 under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act for 'fomenting communal tension' and actions 'prejudicial to India's security.' The Government alleged that the SIMI had links with terrorist groups such as the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba and the Hizbul Mujahideen. The police in three different states arrested eight of its members, including former president of the SIMI Bhopal district unit, Khalid Naeem.

On May 3, 2001, likewise government banned the Muslim group Deendar Anjuman for 'fomenting communal tension' and actions 'prejudicial to India's security'. State



prosecutors alleged that some members of the tiny Muslim group called Deendar Channabasaveshwara Siddique (DCS) and its parent organisation, Deendar Anjuman, were responsible for the Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh church bombings in 2000.

Given the terrorist insurgency throughout the globe, the Islamic groups are the easy target of state in most of the non-Islamic countries.

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## 12.7 CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS AND COMMUNAL MOVEMENTS

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Today Christianity is generally perceived to be associated with a legacy of Western rule which forced its religion upon Indians during the colonial period. However, the fact should be noted that Indian Christians are as old as Christianity itself. St. Thomas, the direct disciple of Jesus Christ, came to India and preached Christianity here soon after the death of Christ, i.e. in 52 A.D. After that many missionaries from different parts of the world preached Christian faith in India. The English missionaries came to India very late. In general, it is believed that 'A missionary is a person for others, one who stands for Justice, spreads the message of equality and love, and cares for the down trodden. But some authors describe Christianity in India as an offshoot of British rule and relate it with the religion of the oppressive and immoral whites and the missionaries being their representatives. However, Christianity, with its charitable, educational and medical institutions, has been able to woo the masses to a greater extent. The issues of discord between Christians and Hindus or Christians and Muslims have been the issues related to conversion.

Christians have been target of attacks by Hindutva forces especially the RSS, VHP and Bajrang Dal. The Hindutva forces argue that the Christians have to "Indianise" themselves. In March 2001, K.S. Sudarshan, the head of the RSS stated that Muslims and Christians 'should sever their links with the Mecca and the Pope and instead become Swadeshi.' He also stated that Christians should 'reinterpret their scriptures' in a manner more in keeping with Hindu cultural norms. Catholics strongly reacted to these kind of statements, the Archbishop of Delhi pointed out that the Indian Christian church is 2,000 years old (traditionally dating from the Apostle Thomas), and that although the spiritual head was the Pope, the day-to-day administration of the church was entirely in Indian hands.

Along with the issues of discord, there have been some attempts to resolve the differences between the Hindutva forces and Christians. On September 1, 2003, the *Times of India* reported about the talk which took place between the RSS and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India. The two met in Nagpur on August 22, 2003, and further talks were scheduled. But the attempts to lessen tensions between Christians and the RSS took a turn for the worse when RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan called on Muslims and Christians to reinterpret their scriptures and change their leadership. The Catholic bishops' conference expressed 'shock and surprise' at the statement made by Sudarshan in Nagpur, according to the October 31, 2003 online edition of *The Hindu*. The Church was also offended by Sudarshan's observation that the leadership of the Christian and Muslim communities has remained in the hands of 'conflict-mongers.' In the opinion of the bishops' conference Secretary-general, Archbishop Oswald Gracias, these observations only strengthen the hands of forces opposed to dialogue.

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## 12.8 SIKH RELIGION AND COMMUNAL MOVEMENTS

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Founded on the traditions of Bhakti movement of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Sikh religion became a powerful source of the mobilisation of the Sikh Community in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Shiromani Akali Dal and Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) were two principal organisations which mobilised Sikhs on the religious lines during the first of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Shiromani Akali Dal launched socio-religious movement in the 1920s to liberate the Gurudwaras from the control of Mahants and landed aristocracy. As a result, the British government gave the SGPC a statutory status.

Even after, the independence the Akali Dal continued to mix religion with politics. In order to maintain separate Sikh Identity and to make the community powerful in the political arena, Master Tara Singh, the most prominent leader of the Akali Dal up to 1962, viewed it exclusively in terms of political interest of the community. He described the then existing situation as a serious threat to the existence of Sikh community. In a statement he maintained, “Now the circumstances have so altered that we have been saved from Muslim domination. But we have been absolutely trapped under Hindu domination... We can not survive under Hindu domination”.

In 1967, the Congress was defeated in the elections and the Akali Dal formed the government in coalition with the BJS and the Communist parties. But during 1967-1971, the Akali Dal ministry fell thrice and there was constant instability due to the intra-factionalism in the Akali Dal.

Intense factional feuds in the Dal manifested in the increasing pressure for reversion to politics of religion and culture during this period, but the ruling leadership, however, managed to maintain ascendancy of secular material consensus and considerations of power in the secular political domain of the state. Even in that process it had to reconcile with Tara Singh faction. The Batala Resolution of 1968, and the Anandpur Sahib Resolution of 1973, which meant in substance the adoption of Master Tara Singh's groups 'Sikh Homeland' thesis as the goal of Akali Dal, proves this point. From 1977-80, the Akali Dal enjoyed effective power in the secular political domain of the state along with control over the SGPC.

In the 1970s the Akali Dal challenged the dominance of Congress in Punjab politics. In order to meet this challenge the Congress used the services of Sikh religious leaders, including Sant Jarnail Singh Bhinderanwale in 1980 assembly elections. Realising their political significance the Sikh religious leaders asserted their autonomy and demanded their share in arena of political power. This gave rise to the competitive politics among political parties Congress, Akali and religious and militant leaders to use religion on the one hand, and movement for Khalistan, a Sikh homeland, on the other. The changing religious, cultural and economic situation and involvement of the people settled in other countries provided fillip to this movement. The large scale violence which included terrorism operation, Blue Star, assassination of political leaders and activists, anti-sikh riots in Delhi in 1984 were some of the repercussions of use of Sikh religion in politics. This set a new trend in Indian politics.

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## 12.9 SUMMARY

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To sum up, the discussion in this unit clearly points out that India which has been a land of religions, is bound to be influenced by religious practices, beliefs and rituals. Religions being integral to culture in general else where in the world and India in particular have been instrumental in moulding the socio-political processes to a considerable extent. The socio-religious movements have proved to be instruments of national consciousness in the 19th and early 20th century. However, with the passage of time due to one or the other reason they have acquired communal and political colour. The religious rivalries within and between the communities have roots that are centuries old, and these tensions at times are exacerbated by poverty, class, and ethnic differences, which have erupted into periodic violence throughout the country's 57-year history. The Government has made some effort, not always successfully, to prevent these incidents and to restore communal harmony when they do occur. However, tensions between Muslims and Hindus, and between Hindus and Christians, continue to pose a challenge to the concepts of secularism, tolerance, and diversity on which the Indian state was founded.

Despite the incidents of violence and discord, relations between various religious groups generally are amicable among the substantial majority of people. The general perception about the plurality of Indian society is that it brings religious leaders together to defuse religious tensions. The annual *Sarva Dharma Sammelan* (All Religious Convention) and the frequently held *Mushairas* (Hindi-Urdu poetry sessions) are some events that help improve inter community relations. Prominent secularists of all religions make public efforts to show respect for other religions by celebrating their holidays and attending social events such as weddings and other functions. Institutions, like bureaucracy and army consciously forge loyalties that transcend religious beliefs. After episodes of violence against Christians, Muslim groups have protested against the mistreatment of Christians by Hindu extremists and in 2001 prominent Catholics spoke out against the killings of six Sikhs in Kashmir. Christian clergy and spokespersons for Christian organisations issued public statements condemning the violence in Gujarat, and the Archbishop of Gandhinagar, the capital of Gujarat, participated in a peace march in April 2003. These small incidences of communal harmony clearly pronounce that India is too diverse and pluralistic for any extremist ideology to entrench itself for long. But it is usage of religious by leaders which disturbs the communal harmony among people following different faiths.

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## 12.10 EXERCISES

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- 1) What do you understand by the phenomenon of communalism? How far religions have contributed to its growth in India?
- 2) Do you think religious and communal movements have contributed to social growth in any way?
- 3) "Majority communalism is more dangerous than minority communalism." Comment.
- 4) "Religious movements often have become a spring board for grabbing political power." In the light of this statement elaborate your views.

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## UNIT 13 AGRARIAN MOVEMENTS

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### Structure

- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 What are the Agrarian Movements and Agrarian Classes?
  - 13.2.1 Meaning
  - 13.2.2 Differentiation within the Agrarian Classes
- 13.3 Approaches to Study Agrarian Movements
- 13.4 Agrarian Movements in the Pre-Independence Period
- 13.5 Agrarian Movements in the Post-Independence Period
  - 13.5.1 Rural Poor: Agricultural Labourers and Small/Poor/Marginal Peasants
  - 13.5.2 Farmers/Middle Peasants/Kulaks/Rich Peasants/Rural Rich
  - 13.5.3 Globalisation and Farmers' Movements
- 13.6 Summary
- 13.7 Exercises

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### 13.1 INTRODUCTION

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Different agrarian classes have resorted to collective action through out the pre-Independence and post-Independence periods. The volume of participation of the classes, response of the state and success of the agrarian movements have depended on the nature of leadership, issues, patterns of mobilisation and the attitude of the authorities. These days the agrarian movements are referred to as among the social movements. This unit discusses the agrarian movements, the reasons and context of their rise or fall, nature of issues taken up by them, nature of leadership and patterns of mobilisation. The basic focus of the unit is on those agrarian movements which took place in the post-Independence period. However, in order to give the students a background to these movements, section 13.4 also discusses the essential features of such movements in the pre-Independence period.

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### 13.2 WHAT ARE THE AGRARIAN MOVEMENTS AND AGRARIAN CLASSES?

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#### 13.2.1 Meaning

Agrarian movements include the movements of agrarian classes which are related to agriculture in terms of working on the land or in terms of both working on land and its ownership. In other words, these are the movements of the agricultural labourers, poor and small peasant/tenants and farmers/kulaks/rich peasants/rural rich. The issues taken up in the agrarian movements are generally economic. But in several cases the economic and social issues overlap. Such cases include where the agrarian class is both an economic and social group; for example in the case of dalits and women the economic and social (self-respect, dignity and gender based discrimination) are also involved. Since you have studied about the movements of dalits, backward classes and women (focusing on the social issues) in units 7, 8 and 10 respectively, this unit primarily focuses on the mobilisation of agrarian classes on the economic issues. However, whenever necessary even non-economic issues are discussed.

### 13.2.2 Differentiation within the Agrarian Classes

Agrarian society is not a homogeneous unit. It is divided on economic and social basis. The mobilisation of an agrarian group depends on the specific issues related to it. The collaboration between different groups or conflict among them also depends on the convergence of the group interests. Therefore, in order to understand the movements of different agrarian classes it is necessary to discuss the criteria to designate a particular class. There are two broad frameworks which are used by the scholars to differentiate or identify different agrarian classes —, i.e., non-Marxian and the Marxian. The advocates of the former take into consideration the multiple factors like caste, geographical zones and size of land holdings to identify the agrarian classes. The classes which belong to the low castes are usually identified as those belonging to the agricultural labourer/poor and small peasants and those belonging to the high castes and middle castes are identified as belonging to the upper classes — rich peasants and land lords. The followers of the latter — the Marxian approach consider the non-Marxian approach as unscientific and give an alternative framework. They argue that a scientific way to differentiate peasantry is to see the proportion of family labour-power in relation to the outside labour-power in working on the land along with the ownership of land. This criterion is based on the writings of Mao and Lenin. Utsa Patnaik has synthesised the criterion of Mao and Lenin in her book *Peasant Class Differentiation: A Study in Method with Reference to Haryana* (Oxford, 1987). Patnaik's model has been used by some other scholars as well. According to this framework those who do not own land but work on other's land or own smaller size of the land holdings and work more on others land than on their own land belong to the classes of agricultural labourers and small and poor peasants; those who own land and agricultural resources, employ agricultural labourers, poor and small peasants or those who own land and do not themselves work on land (except for supervision) but depend on the outside labour are categorised as the rural rich (middle peasants, rich peasants and landlords). Utsa Patnaik's model, however, is more applicable to the areas which have witnessed capitalism than those which still have predominance of feudal mode of production.

In this unit we have grouped the agrarian groups into the following classes:

- i) **The Rural Poor: Agricultural labourers and small/poor/marginal peasants** — Agricultural labourers do not own land but work on others land for wages either as agricultural labourers or tenants. Small/poor/marginal peasants have land but it not enough to meet the basic needs. They have to work on others land also; and
- ii) **Farmers/middle peasants/kulaks/rich peasant/rural rich** — These classes own land and other required paraphernalia in agriculture. They work on their land or do not work themselves except doing the supervisory work along with employing agricultural labourers.

As you will study in the sub-section 13.5.2 the last three decades of the twentieth century saw the movements of a group of agrarian classes, which shared a lot of common characteristics. Notwithstanding, the reservation on the usage of these terms, this category has been addressed as kulaks, middle peasants or the farmers.



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### 13.3 APPROACHES TO STUDY AGRARIAN MOVEMENTS

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Traditionally there have been two approaches to study the agrarian movements – the Marxian and non-Marxian. The former analyse these movements in the light of the social relations of production or the economic relations – how the poorer agrarian classes get mobilised against their exploitation by the exploiting classes. The latter give more emphasis to the cultural and non-economic factors. In the early 1980s there was an addition to the Marxian approach. Influenced by the Gramsci's writings this approach came to be known as the subaltern approach. Subaltern school has had the most profound impact on the study of the agrarian movements. It has been popularised by Ranajit Guha in the series of subaltern studies. This approach is critical of the classical Marxism, which gives primacy to the economic factors over other factors. The subaltern school argues that the peasants have their own consciousness, leadership and other cultural factors which play much more important role than the class. The subaltern school is also criticised by classical Marxists as separating consciousness and culture from the economic structure and thus not giving the true picture of the reality. Rajender Singh analyses the secondary literature on the agrarian movements as parts of the social movements in the post-Marxian perspective in his book *Social Movements, Old and New: Post-Modernist Critique*.

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### 13.4 AGRARIAN MOVEMENTS IN THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

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Ghanshyam Shah while reviewing the literature on social movements in India in the book *Social Movements in India: A Review of Literature* points out that Political Science has been averse to the peoples' participation in politics and movements. In the similar vein a section of literature has categorised the peasants as passive and docile subjects, uninterested in participating in the movements. Barrington Moore Jr. is representative of this perspective. A large number of scholars disputed this view, prominent among them included Kathleen Gough, A. R. Desai, D. N. Dhanagare and Ranajit Guha. In fact, Kathleen Gough identified 77 revolts during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Almost all regions of the country witnessed agrarian movements during the pre-Independence period. Popularly known as the peasant movements, these movements involved all exploited classes – tenants, agricultural labourers, artisans, etc. Ranajit Guha, actually includes those landlords as exploited classes who were indebted to the moneylenders. Among the most prominent of these movements were Oudh peasant movements in UP, Kheda movement in Gujarat, Mopilla movement in Malabar (Kerala), Champaran peasant movement in Bihar, Wahabi, Fairabi and Tebhaga movements of Bengal and Telengana movement in Madras presidencies ( areas forming present Andhra Pradesh).

When you compare the characteristics of these movements with those of the post-Independence period which are discussed in section 13.5 of this unit, you will notice that there are differences in the issues, nature of leadership, ideologies and pattern of mobilisation in the agrarian movements of these two phases — pre and post-Independence. The pre-Independence period movements can be termed as the anti-colonial movements as well, since these movements were against the classes which were supporters of the

British empire — the landlords, moneylenders and other exploiting classes. The issues raised in these movements were related to the nature of agrarian relations. These relations were built on the exploitation of the agrarian classes — tenants/peasants/agricultural labourers, artisans, etc. In order to meet the requirement of the colonial forces and to satisfy their feudal needs, the landlords exploited them in several ways. These included unreasonable increase in the rent, forced gifts (nazarans), *begar* (forced labour) physical torture, insecurity of tenure (eviction). These problems were compounded by natural calamities like famines and flood, commercialisation of crops, indebtedness. The failure to meet the economic and non-economic requirements of the landlords the poor agrarian classes were not only evicted from the land they cultivated they were also tortured physically.

As mentioned earlier the agrarian classes were not silent sufferers. They reacted to the exploitative system in different ways. These ways included both — the ways which James Scott calls “everyday forms of resistance” and in the forms of organised peasant movements. The leadership of the peasant movements of the pre-Independence period articulated the problems of the peasants and mobilised them into action against the landlords, moneylenders and the British administration. The general point which emerges from a large number of studies is that the leadership of these movements came from the non-peasant classes. Kapil Kumar in his book *Peasants in Revolt: Tenants, Landless, Congress and the Raj in Oudh* indicates that though the leadership Oudh peasant movement did not belong to peasants as such, it ran parallel to the leadership of the leadership of the national movement. In the course of time with the merger of this movement with the national movement the leadership of the peasant movement was taken over by the leadership of the national movement. Similar observation is made by scholars some about the Chamapran peasant movement. Religion, caste, nationalism and Marxism provided ideological basis of the peasant during this phase. Religion and caste became the rallying points of the peasants in Oudh, Mopillaha and Wahabi and Fairdie uprisings. The usage of religion generated a debate among the scholars; one group of them categoring such mobilisation as communal while other linking region with the economic problems of the peasants. The attack on the Indian exploited classes — landlords and moneylenders and participation of the peasantry in the armed insurgency in Telengana under the banner of the Communist Party of India are examples of how ideologies of nationalism and Marxism contributed to the mobilisation of the peasants in their movements. The movements took different forms — demonstration, destroying the properties of the landlords and money lenders, boycott of the landlords by the barbers and washer men. On several occasions the movements resulted in violent clashes between the agents of landlords and police.

The peasant movements of the pre-Independence period had impact on the programmes of the Indian National Congress. The Congress Socialist group within the Congress which included later generation of socialists, communists and future Prime Minister of India advocated the need for the drastic land reforms. The Congress appointed a committee to look into the distress of agrarian classes and to suggest measures to ameliorate their conditions. This had its impact on the agrarian policies of country when it became independent. As the land reforms became the state subject, depending on the willingness and political will of the leadership, land reforms became the subject to reckon with in different states of India.

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## 13.5 AGRARIAN MOVEMENTS IN POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

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Certain developments in Indian political economy of the post-Independence era can provide landmarks about the genesis and decline of the agrarian movements. These are the policy measures introduced by the state during the 1950s, both at the national and provincial levels to bring about the agrarian transformation — through land reforms, community development programmes and agricultural Extension schemes; the green revolution in select areas of the country during the 1960s, and opening of agricultural sector to the world market through the latest phase of globalisation from the 1990s. These developments have resulted in emergence of new set of issues, rise of new agrarian classes and decline of erstwhile classes, new types of organisations and patterns of political mobilisation. This section of the unit discusses movements of different agrarian classes. These classes are agricultural labourers, poor and small peasants and the farmers/middle peasants/kulaks/rich peasants/rural rich.

### 13.5.1 Rural Poor: Agricultural Labourers and Small/Poor/Marginal Peasants

The rural poor is a conglomerate of the poorer classes — landless agricultural labourers, tenants, poor, small or marginal farmers who own uneconomic landholdings and supplement their income by working as wage labourers either in agriculture or informal non-agrarian sectors. Most of them belong to low castes — lower backwards and dalits. Unlike the kulaks/middle/rich peasants they face dual problems — social discrimination and economic exploitation. Therefore, while the mobilisation of the better off agrarian classes has mainly been around the economic issue, that of the rural poor has focused both on the social and economic issues. They are sometimes mobilised exclusively on the social and cultural issues, they are also mobilised mainly on the economic issues. Assertion of dalit identity, mainly under the influence of Ambedkarism through different social and cultural organisations of dalits, finding expression in different ways including conversion to another religion are examples of mobilisation on the social and cultural issue. You have read about it in unit 7 which deals with dalit movement in India. This section confines itself to the mobilisation of the rural poor on the economic issues. But as economic problems are intertwined with their social status, their social and economic issues can not be mechanically separated.

The agricultural labourers and poor/small peasants have been mobilised into collective actions through out the post-Independence era in different states of India by different kinds of organisations. The latter included the socialist and communist parties, Gandhians, voluntary groups/NGOs, independent individuals and naxalites. This sub-section discusses some examples of movements of agrarian classes which form the rural poor.

The first two decades following Independence saw the movements of the rural poor in Uttar Pradesh by the socialists and communists on the one hand and by the naxalites and the Communist Party of India on the other hand. The issues on which they were mobilised in the western Uttar Pradesh included redistribution of the *Gaon Samaj* land, abolition of *begar*, giving better wages, lifting of the sanction imposed by the rich classes on the poorer classes for cutting grass needed as fodder from the fields of the former, and protection of the women of the poorer classes from the exploitation of the

men belonging to the richer classes. The forms of protest included hunger strike and demonstrations. The 1960s also saw the mobilisation of dalits by Republican Party of India, which unlike the BSP of the later period took up the cultural issues along with the economic problems. Besides, there are innumerable examples of the protest of the agricultural labourers and poor/small peasants in the form of informal group organisations or “every day forms of resistance” (Jagpal Singh, *Capitalism and Dependence: Chap.IV “Dependence, Resistance and Sanctions”*). In Basti district of eastern Uttar Pradesh, the CPI had organised the Land Grab movement during the 1960s in order to give surplus land to the poorer classes. However, the traditional left and the socialists were unable to mobilise dalits in several parts of the country like some area of Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Orissa. This was because of their neglect of dalit question; though the socialists showed concern for the caste, their focus were the backward castes, not the dalits. This lacuna of the conventional left was corrected by the naxalites in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa. Their ability to combine the economic issues with the caste disabilities enabled them to mobilise the low caste agricultural labourers and poor peasants. Their resolve to get the land reforms implemented and abolish caste discrimination made them popular among these sections. They are not averse to use violence to eliminate “class enemies”, which include police personals, landlords and some politicians. Till recently all naxalite organisations did not participate in the elections; now some of them do take part in elections. Among the most important naxal outfits are *Janashakti* and People’s War Group (PWG) in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha (BPKS) and Marxist Coordination Committee (MCC) in Bihar.

Recent decades have seen the movement of poor peasants who have been affected by the negative impact of development introduced by the state, especially funded by the World Bank. Taking recourse to Gandhian means of protest these movements emerged have as alternative mode of movements. Concerned individuals, civil society organisations, voluntary organisations and NGOs are playing significant roles in such movements. *Narmada Bachao Andolan* led by Medha Patkar is one of the most important examples of such movements.

### **13.5.2 Farmers/Middle Peasants/Kulaks/Rich Peasants/Rural Rich**

The two decades of the last century — the sixties and seventies, witnessed the movements of a section, which is known by different names — farmers, middle peasants, kulaks, rich peasants or rural rich. These movements had their own organisations and leadership. These movements were: those of two separate organisations of the same name — the *Bharatiya Kisan Unions* (BKUs) led by Bhupender Singh Mann in Punjab and by Mahender Singh Tikait in Uttar Pradesh; of *Shetkari Sangathan* led by Sharad Joshi in Maharashtra; of *Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha* led by Prof. Nanjundaswami; of *Khedut Samaj* in Gujarat; of *Vivasayi Sangam* led by Narayanaswami Naidu in Tamil Nadu.

#### **Characteristics**

These movements shared certain characteristics: they emerged in prosperous regions of the country, which have benefited from the green revolution; they were the movements of rural rich, which included rich peasants, landlords and self-cultivating middle peasants in which the middle peasants had the preponderance; these groups had benefited from the land reforms including the abolition of landlordism; socially the middle or intermediate castes (Jats, Gujars, Yadavs, Muslim high castes in UP; Marathas in Maharashtra;

Vokaliggas and Lingayats in Karnataka; Patels in Guajrat) formed the largest composition of them); unlike the peasant movements of the pre-Independence period their issues and demands are related to the market economy like remunerative prices of the agricultural produce, subsidised inputs, reduction in the electricity bills, increase in the time of availability of electricity; their “apolitical” or “non-political” character; claim to represent the rural (*bharat*) interests against urban (India) on the plea the *bharat* is exploited by India; they overlook the division in the rural society and project themselves to be representative of entire rural society; they were being led by a new kind of leadership; they raise new types of issue, etc.

Of these three movements — *Shetkari Sangathan* in Maharashtra, *Karnataka Raiitha Sangha* in Karnataka and BKU movement of UP deserve special discussion for different reasons. It was the “*Bharat* vs. India” thesis of Sharad Joshi which highlighted the rural-urban divide more prominently. Besides, as you will notice later in this unit, Sharad Joshi is only leader who has supported the liberalisation policy of the state, and who also worked as the advisor to the Government of India during the V. P. Singh’s regime. *The Karnataka Rajaya Raiytha Sangha* movement in Karnataka occupies special place due to the socialist background of its leader - Prof. Nanjundaswami. The most striking has been the nature of leadership of the BKU in UP and the role of the traditional institution of *khap* (caste council) in mobilising the farmers.

### **Genesis of Farmers’ Movements**

Since farmers movements are the post- green revolution movements and largely occurred in the green revolution belt, they found the terms of trade against the agricultural sector. The rising cost of input in agriculture could not be met with the returns of the produce. Besides, inability of the system to provide electricity along with the increasing indebtedness to the public institution mainly to meet the input and infrastructural requirement gave birth to the new set of problems of the farmers. Though placed in superior position to the large proportion of the rural poor, this section found itself neglected by the state. Populist promises by the politicians and the hold of this section on the rural vote bank contributed to the feeling of being cheated by the political class. Their expectation from the system further rose with the increasing share of legislators in the centre and state since the era of the Janata Party government in the 1970s. This happened when people in general lost faith in politics, which to them meant formal political institutions — mainly leaders, political parties and elections.

Under these circumstances the farmers responded positively to alternative mode mobilisation, which was marked by the mobilisation on the “apolitical” or “nonpolitical” plank, projected the rural sectors as a homogeneous unit, which was exploited by the urban vested interests. The leadership which not was professional type found it easy to provide leadership to these movements. The example of the BKU movement in UP can be an appropriate example in this context. It was the last of these movements; while other farmers movements took place in the 1970s and the early 1980s, the BKU movement of UP took place mainly in 1988-1989. It was a time when there was complete vacuum of leadership of the farmers caused by the death of Charan Singh on May 29, 1987 and earlier disintegration of the farmers movement in UP following the death of R M Lohia in 1967. This gap was filled up by political party of Charan Singh with frequent changes in its nomenclature. Earlier while in the Congress, Charan Singh was opposed to the agitational politics, though he successfully devised an



strategy to create his political constituency among the backward classes and the middle/rich peasants. But collective mobilisation into political agitation by his party was not as regular or organised as was by the socialists and the communists. The massive political mobilisation by non-party political organisation was by the BKU of Tikait. For the first time the traditional institution of *khap* (caste council) was active in mobilisation of the farmers. This traditional leadership of *khap* (caste council), which was headed by the leader of a *khap* of Jats, Mahender Singh Tikait also included the leaders of *khaps* of several castes.

### **Farmers' Movements before the BKU**

Prior to the BKU mobilisation in the 1980s, the farmers of UP were mobilised mainly by the leftist forces which included both the socialists and the communists. But their mobilisation mainly took place in the 1950s and the 1960s. Apart from the socialists and communists, Charan Singh also attempted to mobilise the farmers of UP during this period. But he did not mobilise them into a collective action. He, in fact, was opposed to the agitations. His mobilisation of farmers was in the form of carving out an electoral base for himself among the middle and backward caste peasants like Jats, Yadavs, Kurmies, Kories, Lodhs, etc of UP. He did so while he was still a member of the Congress. He adopted two-pronged policy for this purpose: first, he articulated the interests of the peasant proprietors; second, he identified himself with the backward caste peasantry. Largely both these groups—backward castes and the peasant proprietors overlapped. This created resentment within the Congress about Charan Singh's attempt to carve base for himself even while he was its member. At an opportune time, following the defeat of Congress in 1967 election in nine states, Charan Singh came out of Congress to form his own party — the Bharatiya Kranti Dal (BKD). After the decline of the mobilisation by the socialist and the communist, as mentioned earlier unlike when he was in the Congress even Charan Singh's party mobilised farmers into agitational politics. But it was not as regular and organised as the mobilisation by the socialists and the communists. Having consolidated his base among the middle caste peasants Charan Singh changed his focus to state and nation politics which catapulted him to the post of Prime Minister in 1980.

The principal issue of the mobilisation was related to cane price, though other issues also mattered. Therefore, the peasant movement in UP was basically sugar cane growers' movements (Jagpal Singh, pp. 87-92). A comparison of these issues with the issues taken up by the farmers movements of the later period shows that were almost same. However, there was a difference; the socialists and communists took them up before the impact of the green revolution was actually felt, while the BKU took them up after the impact of the green revolution had been realised. Opening up sugar mills in different parts of Uttar Pradesh in the 1930s not only encouraged the commercialisation of cropping pattern, it also gave rise to the new issues like the sugar cane growers problems. The peasant mobilisation on these issues took place during the pre-Independence period also, but it was during the 1950s-1960s that the socialists and the communists mobilised them regularly.

Problems of the sugarcane growers, some of which exist even today, were the following: the sugar cane growers would supply the sugar cane to the sugar mills, payment for which was supposed to be made later on; the sugar mills did not mention the price of the sugar cane on the receipt of the sugar cane from the farmers; rampant corruption at the

“centres”, the distant places connecting with mills, where sugar cane would be supplied. The problem was compounded by the fact that the price of the sugar cane was not provided to the farmers on time. It was also not paid in full; it was paid in installments. Therefore, the major demands during the peasant movements of the 1950s-1960s included regular, timely and full (not in installments) payment of the price of the sugar cane to the cane growers.

Through out the 1950s and 1960s the sugar cane growers were mobilised by the socialists and communists during the months of December and March - the peak season for sugar cane harvesting under the banners of organisations like *Hind Kisan Panchayat* and *Kisan Sabha*. They resorted to organising rallies, *dharnas* at the mill gates, conferences of the peasants, etc. Apart from the local leaders, the national and state level leaders like Acharaya J. B. Kripali, A. K. Gopalan, E. M. S. Naboodaripad, Z. A. Ahmed, Gainda Singh and Dada Dharamdhikari visited UP in order to mobilise sugar cane growers. Sometimes this resulted in scuffle between the cane growers and “agents” of the mill owners, and arrest of the leaders of the movement and foisting of charges on them. Towards the end of the 1960s, the leaders of these movement either joined Congress, Charan Singh’s party or became inactive and a phase in the peasant movement came to an end. As you noticed in this unit earlier the peasant mobilisation was done in the coming decades by Charan Singh’s party and by the BKU headed by Tiakait.

### **13.5.3 Globalisation and Farmers’ Movements**

Unlike the earlier movements those of the farmers in the era of globalisation have reacted to the issues related to globalisation. The attempt of the western countries, especially to interfere in the agrarian economy of the country, especially through the Dunkel Draft and GATT evoked different reactions from the farmers movement. While Sharad Joshi, the *Shetkari Sangathan* leader from Maharashtra supported the globalisation, two supported leaders Prof. Nanjudaswami of *Karntaka Rajya Rytha Sangha* and Mahendra Singh Tikait of BKU in UP opposed it. Sharad Joshi argued that the opening of Indian agriculture to the world competition would benefit Indian farmers. His perspective helped him to become an advisor to the Government of India during the regime of V. P. Singh. The opponents of globalisation Nanjudaswami and Tikait got support of academic activist like Vandana Shiva and a large number of the socialist and Gandhians. They argued that that globalisation would not only expose the Indian farmers to the unequal competition with the European farmers, an attempt to change the patent laws about seeds would deprive them of their traditional rights over the preservation and generation of seeds. They opposed the attempt of the government to change the patent laws, demanded abrogation of the subsidies given by the European governments to their farmers. They also opposed the Multinational Companies which used Indian natural resources like water to manufacture soft drinks. In fact, intellectuals like Vandana Shiva argue that modern technology popularised in green revolution has harmed the fertility of land rather than helping it. The opponents of the globalisation organise rallies, demonstration and seminars to register their protest. Following the death of Prof. Nanjudaswami the farmers protest against globalisation has got weakened.

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## **13.6 SUMMARY**

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To sum up, there have been the movements of agrarian classes in India through out the pre and post-Independence periods. Different agrarian classes have been mobilised into

collective actions on their respective issues, by their respective leaderships and organisations. In the pre-green revolution era the traditional Marxists (CPI and CPM), socialists and Naxalites launched agrarian movements in different parts of the country. The issue during that period included land reforms, and wages for the poorer classes, and prices of the produce and making available the infrastructure in the agriculture. Unlike other political organisations, the Naxalites were able to combine the economic exploitation with social justice. The post-green revolution saw the rise of the movements of kulaks or rich peasants in the prosperous regions of the country, which had benefited from the green revolution. Some scholars call them new social movements. Their characteristics were: “apolitical nature”, based on the rural-urban divide, concerned with the issues of commercial economy in agriculture, with new mode of mobilisation and new type of leadership. However, some scholars disagree with the attribution of these characteristics to these movements. Even the globalisation evoked contradictory responses from the leadership of these organisations. This period has also seen the rise of alternative mobilisation of the rural poor which saw the participation of the civil society organisations and intellectual activists.

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### **13.7 EXERCISES**

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- 1) How can you differentiate within the agrarian society?
- 2) Write a note on the peasant movements in the pre-Independence period.
- 3) Compare the characteristics of movements of the rural poor with those of the rich peasants.
- 4) Write a note on the farmers movements of the post-Independence period.
- 5) How did the farmers movements react to the globalisation? Discuss.

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## UNIT 14 WORKING CLASS MOVEMENTS

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### Structure

- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 What is Working Class Movement?
- 14.3 Development of Capitalist Enterprises
- 14.4 Workers' Movements before the Emergence of Trade Unions
- 14.5 Emergence and Growth of Trade Unions
  - 14.5.1 The Beginning
  - 14.5.2 Formation of the AITUC and Subsequent Developments
  - 14.5.3 Division and Political Affiliation
- 14.6 The Movement in the Post-Independence Period
- 14.7 Summary
- 14.8 Exercises

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### 14.1 INTRODUCTION

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The modern working class arose in India in the nineteenth century. This development was due to the establishment of modern factories, railways, dockyards and construction activities relating to roads and buildings. It was a modern working class in the sense of relatively modern organisation of labour and a relatively free market for labour. There were certain important exceptions to this rule. The plantation workers, who also worked for the capitalist employers and produced goods which were sold in the international markets, were recruited and worked under unfree conditions. In fact, for the majority of the workers in colonial India, the recruitment and working conditions were not as free as were present in some other countries which were capitalistically more developed. This situation had its impact on the working class movement as it developed over the years. Apart from less developed economy, the colonial condition also had its bearing on the labour movement. This Unit will discuss the labour movement in India as a social movement.

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### 14.2 WHAT IS WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT?

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It must be clarified right in the beginning that working class movement and trade union movement are not exactly the same thing. They are different in the sense that the working class movement is a much broader phenomenon and covers all kinds of movements involving workers. It includes within its ambit silent protests, passive resistance, individual protests and strikes as well as more organised forms of welfare activities and bigger protests and strikes reaching to the level of general strikes. It involves various kinds of reactions and responses of the workers to the industrial system. These reactions may be to ameliorate the working and living conditions within the industrial system, but they may also be radically opposed to the industrial system itself. Thus labour movement may range from everyday struggles of the workers to general strikes encompassing the whole industry or many industries. It covers the activities and movements of the workers within the capitalist system as well as those opposed to it.

Trade union movement, on the other hand, accepts the industrial system as given but attempts to make it more humane, more amenable to the needs of the workers. It tries to reform the working and living conditions of the workers within the industrial system. The short-term and long-term working of the trade unions is geared towards making the workers more committed to the industrial work while agitating for higher wages, suitable working conditions, stable housing and reasonable credit system. The classic definition of the trade unions which still holds good was formulated by Sidney and Beatrice Webb:

“A trade union, as we understand the term, is a continuous association of wage-earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their employment.”

While labour movement may include various types of structures, pre-industrial or modern in nature, which coordinate the protest activities of the workers, the trade unions are generally hierarchical and bureaucratic, relying upon a variety of functionaries with defined roles. The trade unions run on the basis of continuous membership of and regular contributions from workers. Although the trade unions are hierarchical, these hierarchies are not fixed but are based on the acceptance of democratic principles of equality and elections. In principle, anybody can occupy any post in the trade union hierarchy, irrespective of caste, creed, region or economic status.

Thus, it needs to be made clear that the working class movement is a much larger phenomenon which includes the trade unions. However, it can be said that the trade unions are the most organised and modern expression of the labour movement.

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### **14.3 DEVELOPMENT OF CAPITALIST ENTERPRISES**

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The working class is an integral part of the capitalist economy. Traces of capitalism were introduced in India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century under colonial dispensation. It was an ironic situation where the organisation of production was capitalistic whereas the labour market was unfree. Plantations and railways were the initial enterprises to herald the era of colonial capitalism in Indian subcontinent. A British company, the Assam Tea Company, was established in 1839 to set up tea gardens in Assam; coffee plantations were started in South India by 1840. Companies which were organised along capitalist lines and produced for international markets established these plantations. However, force and manipulation were used to recruit the labourers who were then kept in bonded condition. The expansion railways, especially after the revolt of 1857 provided suitable conditions for the development of capitalist enterprise in India. The migration of the indentured labour, transport of raw material and manufactured good within and outside the country became much easier. Port cities Bombay, Calcutta and Madras became the centres of the capitalist economy. Cotton mills in Bombay, jute mills in Calcutta, and several factories in Madras were set up in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Similar developments took place in some other cities as well, i.e., Ahmedabad, Kanpur, Sholapur and Nagpur. It was mostly owned by the Indians. A Scottish entrepreneur started the first jute mill in Calcutta in 1854. It also expanded rapidly over the next fifty years. The ownership of the cotton mills was with the Indian entrepreneurs, while that of jute was of the with the foreigners for a long time. By 1914, there were 264 cotton mills in India employing 260,000 workers, 60 jute mills with 200,000 workers, the railways provided work to 600,000 people, the plantations to 700,000 workers and mines to 150,000 workers.



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## 14.4 WORKERS' MOVEMENTS BEFORE THE EMERGENCE OF TRADE UNIONS

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Even before the emergence of trade unions after the First World War there have been various forms of labour movements and protest against low wages, long working hours, inhuman conditions of work and several other issues. In fact, the trade unions can be seen as the result of these earlier labour struggles to secure their demands. The trade unions, however, were the most organised and advanced form of labour organisation when they emerged. In this section we will introduce you to the labour movements in the period before the emergence of the trade unions.

Although the plantations and mines contained a large number of workers who were heavily exploited, their conditions did not attract much attention in the initial period because they were far from the urban areas, away from the notice of early social reformers, journalists and public activists. But, despite this isolation, the plantation workers, on their own, registered their protests against the exploitation and oppression by the plantation owners and managers. Reports of such resistance are available since 1884. Individual and collective abstention from work and abandonment of the tea gardens were forms of passive resistance by the workers. More active forms of protests were expressed in individual and collective violence against the assaults by the plantation authorities. All these protests were severely repressed by the planters' musclemen with the help of the colonial police.

The workers in the cotton and jute industries and in the railways, on the other hand, were more in the public gaze. The early social workers and philanthropists were also involved with them. This facilitated better organisational work as well as better reporting and public support. Records of open resistance are available since the 1870s in Bombay. In 1884, the Bombay cotton mill workers held a big meeting and submitted their demands to the government for lesser hours of work. There were also reports of strikes among the mill workers. By the 1890s, the strikes became so frequent that the authorities spoke about a 'strike mania' among the workers. These strikes and protests increasingly began to involve more and more workers. The increasing duration of strikes and involvement of larger number of workers forced the Bombay Millowners' Association to refer to the existence of a 'labour movement' in this country in 1913. The increasing intensity and frequency of strikes on wages and other issues created a situation where it was possible to combine at a wider level. The rising prices, declining real wages, and shortage of foodstuffs during the First World War created the situation for a larger action and it resulted in the general strike in 1919 involving all cotton textile mills in Bombay. There was another general strike in 1920 on the issue of wages and bonus. These took place before the existence of any trade unions in the Bombay mills.

In other industrial centres like Calcutta, Ahmedabad, Kanpur, Madras, Nagpur and Surat the situation was almost similar. The workers were slowly learning to protest and combine for the redress of their grievances. These combinations were increasingly growing bigger involving larger number of workers. The War years, which allowed the industrialists to make huge profits while the workers' real wages declined, made the workers extremely dissatisfied with their conditions and, therefore, created the atmosphere for a broader unity leading to bigger strikes in many industrial centres. Strike waves

spread in other places and engulfed non-factory concerns like railways, plantations, mines, ports and docks, engineering workshops, oil installations, government mint and presses, tramways, gas and electricity supply undertakings and even the municipal workers.

There were many people and organisations involved with these workers. In Bengal, Sasipada Banerjee initiated welfare activities among the workers since the early 1870s. He tried to educate them and to voice their grievances. For this purpose, he founded the 'Working Men's Club' in 1870 and started publishing a monthly journal in Bengali entitled *Bharat Shramjibi* in 1874. The Brahmo Samaj formed the 'Working Men's Mission' in Bengal in 1878 to impart moral education among the workers. It also established the 'Working Men's Institution' in 1905. In Bombay, N.M.Lokhanday was actively involved in welfare and organisational activities among the cotton mill workers since the 1880s. In 1890, he established the 'Bombay Millhands' Association', and in 1898, he started publishing a journal entitled *Dinbandhu* in Marathi. Besides him, S.S.Bengali was also actively propagating for improving the conditions of the workers since 1878. Some other important organisations active among the Bombay workers were the Bombay Millhands Defence Association formed by Bal Gangadhar Tilak in 1908, the *Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha* formed in 1909, and the Social Service League established in 1911. However, these bodies were primarily interested in welfare activities and did not have much organisational base among the workers. Workers' protests in this period were basically organised by the jobbers, the sardars and such other informal leaders or by the vocal and active sections among the workers themselves.

There were some organisations in this period which resembled the trade unions. The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants of India and Burma formed in 1897, the Printers' Union in Calcutta, and the Postal Union in Bombay were among these. But they could not maintain any continuity in their functioning and were in existence for a short period only.

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## **14.5 EMERGENCE AND GROWTH OF TRADE UNIONS**

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The Indian trade unions have developed in the specific context of colonialism and an underdeveloped economy. The problems of the developing economy still continue in the post-independence period. With lower levels of education, higher levels of unemployment and underemployment, and lower wages, the workers in India face many problems which are also reflected in the union growth. In this section we will discuss the rise and growth of Indian trade unions and various features associated with them.

### **14.5.1 The Beginning**

The trade unions emerged in India after the First World War. As you have already read in the section 14.4, even before the emergence of the trade unions in the post-first World War period, the workers in India were involved in the movement. This raised their consciousness. Further, the rising prices of essential commodities, decline in the real wages of workers, increase in the demand for the industrial products resulting in the expansion of India industries, Gandhi's call for the non-cooperation movement, the Russian Revolution, etc., were the main factors which led to the emergence of trade unions in the post-War period in India.

The Madras Labour Union, formed in April 1918, is generally considered to be the first trade union in India. B.P.Wadia, a nationalist leader and an associate of Annie Besant, was instrumental for its organisation. It was mainly an organisation based on the workers of Carnatic and Buckingham Mills in Madras. But workers from other trades such as tramways, rickshaw-pullers, etc. also joined the union in the initial stage. For the first time in India, there was a regular membership and the members were to contribute one *anna* as monthly subscription.

Around the same time, labour agitation had started in Ahmedabad which was to lead towards a completely different model of labour organisation. The workers in Ahmedabad were agitating for a bonus to compensate for the rise in prices. Ansuyaben Sarabhai, who was involved with the agitation, got in touch with Gandhi and requested him to come to Ahmedabad. Gandhi stood by the workers' side and demanded that the workers should be given 35 per cent bonus. On the refusal of the millowners, he called for a strike and insisted that the principle of arbitration should be accepted. He also went on a fast to persuade the millowners. Finally, the millowners accepted arbitration and as a compromise, the arbitrator recommended 27.5 per cent increase in wages. On the basis of this struggle and on the principle of arbitration, the Textile Labour Association, also known as *Majur Mahajan*, was established in Ahmedabad in 1920. This union worked along Gandhian lines and became very strong over the years.

The trade union movement now picked up momentum and many more unions were formed in many centres. By 1920, according to an estimate there were 125 unions consisting of 250,000 members. This was a fairly impressive growth by any standards. But if we consider the durability and consistency of these unions, we find that most of them were very temporary in nature and were little more than strike committees. They were formed basically to conduct strikes and dissolved soon after the strike ended. There was no regular membership, nor were there regular payments from the members. However, the impetus provided by the trade union growth was such that soon a national organisation of the working classes was established.

#### **14.5.2 Formation of the AITUC and Subsequent Developments**

The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) was formed in 1920 as a development of these trends towards union formation all over India. Many people connected with labour realised that there was a need for a central organisation of labour to coordinate the works of the trade unions all over India. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, N.M.Joshi, B.P.Wadia, Dewan Chamanlall, Lala Lajpat Rai, Joseph Baptista and many others were trying to achieve this goal. The formation of the International Labour Organisation ( ILO ) in 1919 acted as a catalyst for it. It was felt that there should be a national organisation of the trade unions whose nominees could be chosen to represent the Indian labour in the ILO.

Lala Lajpat Rai became the first president of the AITUC and Joseph Baptista its vice-president. Motilal Nehru and Vithalbhai Patel were also present. The AITUC received a lot of support from the Indian National Congress. There were about 107 unions which were affiliated or sympathetic to the AITUC. Out of these 64 unions had 140,854 members. One notable absence was the Gandhian trade union of Ahmedabad, the Textile Labour Union.

It was a promising beginning and the AITUC continued to grow until it split in 1929. In the aftermath of the First World War, there were numerous strikes by the workers all over India. As expected, most of these unions were present in the advanced industrial centres like Bombay, Calcutta, Kanpur, Ahmedabad, and Madras. The main industries where these unions were formed were cotton and jute textiles, railways, shipping, iron and steel and post and telegraphs.

In political terms, the most important phenomenon in the field of labour movement in India was the emergence of the communists. The communist ideology, deriving from the theories of Marx and Lenin, assigns the working class the central place. It was, therefore, natural that the communists would be closely involved with the labour movement in India.

The Communist Party of India (CPI) was formed abroad in Soviet Union in October 1920. M.N.Roy was the moving force behind this. Soon after the formation of the CPI, the communists became active in the labour movements. Bombay and Calcutta invited their particular attention due to the labour concentration and earlier labour struggles in these cities. The communists organised the workers in cotton mills of Bombay and jute mills of Calcutta, besides many other industries and led militant struggles. Due to their commitment to the cause of labour and their devotion to the organisational work, they were soon able to organise many new unions and gained ascendancy in the old ones. By 1928-29, they were able to gain a marginal majority in the AITUC. In the tenth session of the AITUC held in Nagpur and presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru, the communists were able to pass resolutions calling for the boycott of the Royal Commission on Labour, demanding dissociation from the ILO and association with the League against Imperialism. The moderate and reformist group, led by N.M.Joshi, Dewan Chaman Lall, V.V.Giri and B.Shiva Rao, was unable to digest these moves, and left the AITUC along with 30 unions and a membership of 95,639 and formed the Indian Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), while the AITUC was left with only 21 unions and 92,797 members. This was almost a vertical split in this all India organisation of workers.

Another split occurred in 1931 due to divergence between the nationalist and communist opinions. The communists severely criticised Gandhi and condemned the Round Table Conference in which the Congress was participating. They wanted to pass a resolution to this effect. Unable to secure a majority for this, they walked out and formed another federation of trade unions, called the Red Trade Union Congress (RTUC). Thus, by 1931, there were three national federations of trade unions – the AITUC, the IFTU and the RTUC.

It was felt by many trade union leaders that the division in their ranks was creating problems for their political and economic struggles. Therefore, there were attempts for unity immediately after the splits. As a beginning, the Railway unions and some unaffiliated unions united with the IFTU to form the National Federation of Trade Unions (NFTU) in 1933. It had 47 unions and 135,000 members. At another level also there was a move towards unity. The Red Trade Union Congress, led by the communists and the AITUC, led by radical nationalists, were coming closer. They united in 1935 and the name AITUC was retained for the unified organisation.

There was a strong desire for unity among the ranks of the trade unions. It was due to the intensified nationalist and anti-imperialist consciousness. To achieve unity among

the anti-imperialist forces, both the AITUC and NFTU were making intense efforts. The unity was achieved in 1940 when the NFTU merged with the AITUC and N.M.Joshi of the NFTU became its general secretary.

### **14.5.3 Division and Political Affiliation**

As soon as the unity was achieved, the division resurfaced in the organisation owing to the varying politics of the trade union leaders. The Second World War created this rift. Some of the trade union leaders led by M.N.Roy believed that the fascist countries were the main enemies and the democratic countries should be supported against them. But the majority of the trade union leaders comprising the nationalists and communists in the initial stages, while agreeing with this opinion in principle, decided to remain neutral because Britain, which was in control of India, was not willing to promise independence to this country. The Roy Group broke from the AITUC in July 1941 and decided to support the British Indian Government in its War efforts by not sponsoring strikes and by trying to convince the workers to raise productivity. The Group set up the Indian Federation of Labour ( IFL ) and claimed the affiliation of 182 unions with a membership of over two lakh workers. It continued its active support to government's War efforts, while the AITUC maintained the stance of neutrality.

In the post-War period, when the contours of a national government was becoming apparent, the political rivalry within the trade unions became even more acute. The Congress tried to influence the AITUC and its unions to work along Gandhian lines and in support of the Congress. But by then the communist influence had grown very strong. The Congress, therefore, decided to form its own trade union organisation. The foundation of the in May 1947 Indian National Trade Union Congress ( INTUC ) was the result of this effort. In 1948, the unions under the influence of the Congress Socialists came out of the AITUC and formed the Hind Mazdoor Panchayat ( HMP ). In 1949, another organisation called United Trade Union Congress was formed under the famous trade union leader, Mrinal Kanti Bose. In 1949, the HMP and the IFL united to found the Hind Mazdoor Sabha ( HMS ). Thus, in 1949, there were four central trade union federations – the AITUC, the INTUC, the HMS and the UTUC.

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## **14.6 THE MOVEMENT IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD**

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The post-independence period also saw the formations *Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh* ( BMS ) in 1955, affiliated to the Jansangh, which was formed in 1952. In 1970, following the split in the Communist Party of India in 1964, the AITUC split leading to the formation of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU ) which was affiliated to the newly formed Communist Party of India (Marxist) or the CPM. Thus, we find that the trade union movement, which began with a central organisation ( the AITUC ) in 1920, had become divided into five major central organisations by 1970.

In the post-independence period, the state became the sole arbitrator in the relationships between the industry and the working class. During this period the main concern of government was to achieve growth, industrial peace, and proper management of the conflict between workers and the management. In order to achieve these goals the state passed laws like the Industrial Dispute Act, 1947, and introduced the Labour Relations Bill and Trade Unions Bills in 1949.



The economic recession in the late 1960s caused economic hardships for the workers in the Bombay. It was reflected in the growing unemployment and financial burden of the workers. Inability of the traditional trade unions to solve problems of the working class provided a fertile ground for the birth and growth of Shiv Sena. Shiv Sena founded a trade union the *Bharatiya Kamgar Sena*. It emerged as an alternative to the traditional trade unions. But *Bharatiya Kamgar Sena* divided the working class on the ethnic ground. It said that the problems of the working class were caused by the large number of workers who had come from other regions of the country, especially south India. The Shiv Sena argued that if the outsiders left Bombay, the workers who are natives of Maharashtra can get employment and lead better life. In the due course of time the Shiv Sena directed its attack against the communists. Shiv Sena's movement divided the working class on the ethnic basis and it gave blow to the unity of the working class in Bombay. This division once created continued in the latter period. Some argue that Shiv Sena worked on behalf of the industrialists to divide the working class. However, the *Bharatiya Kamgar Sena* also could not satisfy the workers. It not only generated a feeling of insecurity among the non-Maharashtrian workers but also divided them on the ethnic and communal lines.

By the mid-1970s, there was a general feeling among different social groups the country against the organised traditional political institutions and processes like political parties and organisations affiliated to them like trade unions, elections, professional political leaders. This created resentment against such notion of politics. Any alternative to such politics or anything "political" which could be available to the people attracted their support to a considerable extent. During the 1970s-1980s such alternatives emerged in the form of independent leaders, unaffiliated to any traditional political party/any party/ "apolitical" or organisations. Most significant among these included: Datta Samant, A.K. Roy and Shankar Guha Niyogy, Ela Bhatt. ; Working Women's Forum (Chennai), Self Employed Women's Association (Gujarat), Society for Technology and Development (Himachal Pradesh), *Ama Sangathana* (Orissa), *Kerala Dinesh Beedi* (Kerala) and *Kagad Kach Patra Kashtkari Panchayat* (Maharashtra). These leaders and organisations (independent in terms of not being affiliated to any party directly or indirectly) are also less hierarchical and bureaucratic, but mostly do not believe in radical changes. These organisations help their members to improve their conditions. However, they are not a substitute for the trade unions. The strikes of the workers in the textile industry and railways during 1970s and 1980s are considered to be the most significant developments in the history of the working class movement in the post-independence period.

In 1982-83 the textile workers of Bombay were mobilised into strike which was considered to have "few parallels" in the working class movement in the country. Dissatisfied with the traditional leadership and the trade unions the textile workers of Bombay responded to the call of a new leader and the organisation. Datta Samant, the president of the *Maharashtra Girni Kamgar Union (MGKU)* was able to mobilise a large section of the textile workers of Bombay. His focus of mobilisation was mainly the economic issues. Salim Lakra observes that his emphasis on economic issues opened him to the accusation of "economism" and neglect of the class-based political issues. Datta Samant posed a challenge to the leadership of other trade unions, especially the Shiv Sena affiliate — the *Bharatiya Kamgar Sena* and the *Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh* (RMMS) affiliated to the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC). Though the strike did not achieve its goals, it "did not damage the status of Datta Samant amongst the workers".

In 1974 the railway workers affiliated to the main trade unions, except the Congress affiliated INTUC organised a nation-wide strike. The rail operations came to a halt during the strike. The government responded with the strong anti-worker stand and tried to break the strike. Unable to sustain the strike in the face government's recalcitrant attitude, the workers could not continue the strike. A few years after this strike the Congress-led government imposed emergency during 1975-1977 in the country and introduced measures which restrained the workers to strike. In fact, as E. A. Ramaswami observes the government has largely favoured the management in the negotiations between the management and the striking workers.

With some exceptions the studies generally focus on the movements of the organised and formal sectors. While the political parties, especially those belonging to the left, have organised the agricultural labourers, some times the agricultural labourers have launched agitations without the leadership of trade unions on issues relating to the wages, the non-economic coercion on them, decrease in the time of working. For example, harvesters belonging to the low castes went on strike in the early 1980s in a village of western UP. They demanded increase in the wages and number of *rotis* served to them in the breakfast; increase in the sheaves for harvesting the wheat. In the agitation the harvesters showed a remarkable unity. The strike was observed at the peak season of harvesting in April for four days. The sanctions imposed by the Jat landowning classes on the agitating harvesters did not deter them. Ultimately the strike resulted in some success. The wages, the size of sheaves, and number of *rotis* were increased. There are number of examples of such protest by the agricultural labourers launched at their initiative. In several instances, the protest also assumes the form of what James Scott calls "everyday forms of resistance". Jan Breman in his *Footloose Labour: Working in the India's Informal Economy* discusses the collective actions of the seasonal migrant workers which took place around 1983 in the brickworks near Vadodra in Gujarat. At the initiative of local social activists, a trade union was set up there. However, their agitation did not meet any success.

The working class movement in India is constrained by several factors. H.I Rudolph and S.H. Rudolph argue that the organised working class forms a very small section of the working population in India. Therefore, there is no class politics in the country. In stead Indian politics is a centrist politics. Such statement overlooks the presence of a large number of trade unions and their mobilisation of the working class from time to time. No doubt, the rise of identity politics based on caste, language, religion, tribe, regions, etc., especially from the last two decades of the twentieth century pose serious challenges to unite the working class on their issues. The encouragement to the market with the decline role of the state as part of the globalisation agenda has further relegated the issues of working classes to the background.

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## 14.7 SUMMARY

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The modern working class movement in India is a result of the introduction of capitalist economy by the colonial government. The plantations, railways, cotton and jute mills, coal mining and various other industries made their appearance in colonial India. Initially, most of the capital was British while certain industries, such as cotton textile and iron and steel were Indian owned. Lakhs of workers were recruited for running these concerns. The abysmal working and living conditions in the early decades gave rise to protests

and ultimately led to movements among the workers. The trade unions which emerged later on provided organised expression to these early protests and movements. The organised struggles of the working class resulted in the betterment of their conditions. There were, however, many problems with these unions as they did not, and could not, cover the majority of workers. Thus there emerged several other organisations of the working class which were not part of these unions.

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## **14.8 EXERCISES**

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- 1) What is meant by “working class movement”? Discuss the nature of the working class movement in the pre-independence period.
- 2) Write a note on emergence and growth of trade unions in India.
- 3) Discuss the main features of the working class movement in India during the post-independence period.

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## UNIT 15 FISHER FOLKS' MOVEMENTS

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### Structure

- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 Socio-economic Profile
  - 15.2.1 Heterogeneity
  - 15.2.2 Dependence on Others
  - 15.2.3 Victims of Natural Disaster
  - 15.2.4 Mechanisation, Globalisation and Fisher Folks
- 15.3 Issues, Leadership and Organisations
- 15.4 Collective Actions of Fisher Folks: Some Examples
  - 15.4.1 Fisher Folks' Movement in Kerala
  - 15.4.2 Fisher Folks' Movement of Chilika Lake: Anti-Prawn Culture Agitation
- 15.5 Summary
- 15.6 Exercises

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### 15.1 INTRODUCTION

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Unlike other social groups the collective actions of the fisher folks have generally gone unnoticed in the academic discourse. This perhaps is due to the fact the collective actions by the fisher folks themselves have been relatively less in number than those of other groups. However, their problems have been raised by political parties, civil society organisations and church leaders. But this has been mainly in terms of demanding relief to the fisher folks who suffered due to the natural disaster like tsunami. Nevertheless, there are examples of the collective actions of the fisher folks, which can be categorised as the social movements of the fisher folks. In this unit, we will discuss their social movements. The unit will specifically focus on socio-economic conditions of fisher folks, their issues/ problems and collective actions with reference to two examples, i.e., fisher folks movement in Kerala and Orissa.

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### 15.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE

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#### 15.2.1 Heterogeneity

Fisher folks, (nearly 12 million) form a large section of the Indian population. They contribute enormously to the economy of the country, especially the states situated along the coastlines i.e., Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal, Goa, Andaman Nicobar, Pondicherry, Maharashtra, Gujarat, etc. Involved in the fisheries – catching, selling, processing and marketing fish for centuries, fisher folks provide fish which form the staple of the people living in the coastal states, and also non-vegetarian population living in other states than those of the coastal regions. They also link Indian economy to the world economy through the export of the marine products. Fisher folks are not homogenous groups. They follow multiple religions, a large number of them belong to the low castes. Apart from the coastal regions, they are also found in other areas of the country involved in the fisheries, ponds and big tanks. Largely fisher folks belong to the vulnerable groups of the society. Prof. John Kurien argues that in some area of Tamil Nadu like Nagapattinam, fishing community is not poor and generally

they are better off than many other social groups; in three decades of the last century there has been a considerable improvement in their economic conditions. But they remain “outliers in cultural, social and political terms”.

Besides the division among them on religious and caste basis, they are stratified on the basis of ownership of vessels and employment of labour. On these basis, the fisher folks can be divided into three groups:

- 1) fisher folks who own vessels and work with their families;
- 2) Those who own these and employ other fisher folks; they include film stars, politicians and other wealthy persons.
- 3) Those who do not own them but work on others’ vehicles.

The number of fisher folks who own vehicles is very small. Besides, majority of them own ordinary vessels which are traditional and of poor quality. Those who employ others own trawlers and big boats, better quality and modern vessels.

The fishing activities depend on the weather conditions, which are mostly hostile. During the period of unfavourable weather conditions, the fisher folks get engaged in odd jobs on the harbour.

### **15.2.2 Dependence on Others**

Fisher folks depend on a large number of people. The latter include intermediaries who work as the agents of traders, moneylenders, non-fisher folk owners of trawlers and big boats. The fisher folks do not have direct access to the market. They sell their catch to the intermediaries (or the agents) who in turn sell them to the traders. The intermediaries take their commission and the fisher folks do not get the fair price of their catch. Their earnings are not enough to meet their basic needs which include the items of daily needs and the purchase of boats, catamarans, mechanised boats, nets, catamarans fitted with motors, etc. This forces them to borrow from the intermediaries, traders or the employers on the adverse terms and conditions. Thus intermediaries, merchants, non-fisher folks and richer fisher folks, owners of big boats also work as moneylenders. Generally the fisher folks borrow advance from the moneylenders. As one of the conditions the catch would be given to the trader-cum moneylenders at the prices fixed by the latter. Also, the traders capture the catch from the boats and fix the prices after these have been sold. Although the entire family of a fisher folk is involved in the fisheries, it is the women who are the worst affected by the intervention of the rich merchants and traders.

### **15.2.3 Victims of Natural Disaster**

Their close habitat and dependence on sea for the fisheries exposes the fisher folks to natural disasters like flood, typhoon and tsunami. These natural disasters affects the fisher folks the most. They are deprived of their houses, vessels and lives. The super cyclone in Orissa in 1999 had affected the fisher folks there. The tsunami of December 26, 2004 which affected the coastal regions of South Asia and South East Asia had the devastating impact on residents and tourists of these regions. But these were the fisher folks as a single group which was affected by tsunami. It not only killed many of them and destroyed their vessels and residences, it disturbed their centuries old faith in the sea. It created fear- psychoses about the sea among the fisher folks.



### **15.2.4 Mechanisation, Globalisation and Fisher Folks**

Traditionally fishing was carried out by small, unpowered craft confined to shallow waters. Mechanisation began with the Indo-Norwegian Project in 1953, whereby mechanised fishing equipments were permitted to catch fish indiscriminately with the aim to increase fish catches and augment the production of shrimps. Increasing demand for shrimps from advanced countries like Japan and USA created a further impetus to intensify fishing with the use of bottom trawlers. This not only led to dwindling of fish stocks, but the traditional fishermen who were unable to afford mechanised fishing equipments began to face livelihood problems as the coastal fishing belt was captured by resourceful non-fishermen. The government also gave active support to private groups through preferential credit schemes. The beneficiaries of the new schemes were affluent traditional fishermen, who had turned entrepreneurs, and non-fishermen with resources. The impact of technological change in an already fragile ecological zone resulted in a decline in the fish stocks and a subsequent drop in the income of traditional fishermen.

The non-fisher folks were further encouraged to dominate fisheries in the 1990s in the light of globalisation. As you will study in sub-section 15.4.2, the Tata House had attempted to set up the shrimp farming in Chilika Lake in Orissa, which not only displaced the fisher folks but also created the environmental hazards. Again, the P.V. Narasingha Rao government introduced modern technology in the fisheries as a part of liberalisation policy.

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## **15.3 ISSUES, LEADERSHIP AND ORGANISATIONS**

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### **Issues**

The principal issues/demands on which could be collective actions of the fisher folks are organised are:

- 1) Participation of the fisher folks in fisheries and fishery management; sale and processing of harnessed catches;
- 2) Opposition to the introduction of travelers;
- 3) Resource allocation and management of fisheries;
- 4) Providing catamarans, boats, loans/grants;
- 5) Rehabilitation (in case of the natural disasters) –
- 6) Exploitation by the agents, traders and moneylenders.
- 7) Others: problems arising out of bilateral relations between neighbouring countries – Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan which include arrest of fisher folks while fishing (as they are not able to identify the demarcation of the sea line between India and these countries).

### **Leadership**

Leadership to the fisher folks movements in South India is provided by the church fathers, nuns intellectual-academic activists, student-social activists, professional social workers, community organisers, social and physical scientists. Many of them belong to the fisher-folk communities. They work in league with NGOs concerned with the socio-economic and ecological issues. Most important among them are Fr. Thomas Kocherry, Fr. Puthhenveed. Fr. Paul Arakkal, Fr. Albert Parisavilla, Fr. Peter D'cruze. They

organised the fisher-folks in Kerala on several occasions. Prof. John Kurien is known to have provided leadership to the fisher folks as an intellectual-academic activist. The leadership operates at two levels — local and national. Some of the regional level leaders have graduated to the status of national level leaders of fisher folks. For example, Fr. Thomas Kocherry, a Redemptorist priest and the most towering leader of fisher folks movement of the 1980s, started his political activities in Trivendram district. And he rose to the status of all India level leader in the 1990s. Within due course of the joining the movement, Kochhery took control of the NFF (National Fishermen's Forum). It disappointed the earlier generation of clergy and Bishops. They organised the *Kerala Catholic Bishop Conference* in Kottayam. Kochhery belonged to the “radical” leadership and following his joining of the ASKMTF (*Akhil Kerala Swathantra Malsia Thozhilalee Federation* or the ‘All-Kerala Independent Fishermen's Federation’) the organisation was split in 1983. The two groups of the ASKMTF were led by Fr. Kocherry and Fr. Farisavila separately. The group led by Fr. Farisavila was considered “loyalist” to the Congress by Fr. Kocherry group: the latter held that the group of Fr. Farisavila was formed at the instance of the Congress, which was partner in United Democratic Front (UDF) led by K. Karunakaran. The split in the ASKMTF had impact on the affairs of church; Fr. Kocherry was transferred from his Parish to Kerala. The older generation accused Fr. Kocherry of being in league with the communists and attacked liberation theology which the latter adhered to.

A large number of leaders of the fisher folks were influenced by the ideology of “Liberation Theology” which sought an alliance between Marxism and Christianity in order to liberate the mankind from miseries of life.

### **Organisations**

First attempts to form fisher folks' organisations at village, state and national levels in India were made in the 1960s and 1970s. The earliest union was formed in 1963 in Quilon district in Kerala. By the 1980s the unions were formed in Alleppey, Cochin, Trivendram and Malabar districts. In Kerala there was a direct linkage between the Roman Catholic church and the leadership of these organisations. But it was only in the 1980s and 1990s that these organisations mobilised fisher folks into a movement. There were fisher folks unions in other coastal states like Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. But it was in Kerala where they were most assertive and articulate.

The most significant fisher folks unions in Kerala was *Kerala Swatantra Malsaya Thozhilali Federation* (KSMTF) or Kerala Independent Fisher Workers' Federation. It was an *apolitical* organisation in that it was not affiliated to any political party. In 1977 several district levels unions merged together to form *Kerala Latheen Catholica Malsia Thozhilalee Federation* (KLCFF) was formed. Its state level leadership was principally a cleric leadership, though there were non-cleric leaders also. In order to seek support from the Muslim and Hindu fisher folks, it changed its name to *Akhil Kerala Swathantra Malsia Thozhilalee Federation* (AKSMTF) - the ‘All-Kerala Independent Fishermen's Federation’.

In 1978 the fisher folks' unions of Goa, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and other sates formed a confederation, which came to be called as the National Fishermens Forum (NFF).

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## 15.4 COLLECTIVE ACTIONS OF FISHER FOLKS: SOME EXAMPLES

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Since the 1960s there have been agitations of the fisher folks' in different forms and degrees in the coastal states of the country on some of the issues, which are discussed in the section 15.3 of this units. But it was only from the 1980s that fisher folks' movement took a concrete shape. But Prof. John Kurien points out that the fisher folks' organisations have been concerned more about the allocation of resources and management of fisheries than about their exploitation by the middle men, merchants and moneylenders. He further points out that the development work among the fisher folks by the government is "project-oriented, not people or community oriented". This section deals with the collective actions or the social movements of fisher folks with the help of two examples i.e., their collective actions in Kerala and Orissa.

### 15.4.1 Fisher Folks' Movement in Kerala

The first major organised movement of the fisher folks' in Kerala was in the form of protest against the introduction of trawlers, which took place in the late 1970s. This was consequential to the changes which were a result of the intervention in the early 1960s of the "non-fishermen" investors in the fisheries economy. Shrimp, of which Kerala is among the richest producer, has traditionally been consumed in the South-East Asian countries rather than in Kerala. Demand for the shrimp increased in the international market, especially in the USA, in the early 1960s. In this context a fisheries aid project aided by the Norwegian Government popularised freezing technology and a small variety of trawlers. This led to the entry of the non-fishermen traders in the fisheries, whose prime motive was to earn profit. This also resulted in the proliferation of freezing technology and trawlers. The non-fishermen investors expanded the area of fishing from deep to shallow water. Their entry into the shallow water brought the fisher folks and the profit-making investors into direct competition. Faced with their extinction from fishing in the shallow water and unable to do so in the deep water, the fisher folks protested. During the 1970s there were several instances of the localised riots/protests of the fisher folks of Kerala. By the end of the 1970s their protest took an organised form.

The organisation which organised the fisher folks in their protest was *Kerala Swatantra Malsaya Thozhilali Federation* (KSMTF) or Kerala Independent Fisher Workers' Federation. The leadership to the KSMTF was provided by "A small but influential minority of community organisers, radical Christian clergy and nuns and social scientists". The KSMTE had units at village and district levels with active cadres. The fisher folks' agitations took the form of rallies, processions, demonstration, hunger strikes and *dharnas* in the district headquarters and outside secretariat in Trivendram. They also resorted to lobbying. The agitators also damaged the trawlers, which resulted in police firing and *lathi* charge on them.

Again in 1981, the KSMTF organised demonstrations in 1981 at the focal points of the 600 km. coastal lines in order to catch the attention of the policy makers and planners. The demonstration saw the participation of all age groups which included a larger number of women. The main demands of the agitators included:

- 1) exclusive fishing zone for the small scale fisher folks,
- 2) a closed season for the trawling operation “during monsoon months of June to July”,
- 3) a total ban on the purse-seiner operations, and
- 4) other demands for greater welfare measures for fish workers.
- 5) As their traditional rights to the sea, value system and the technologies have undergone changes to their disadvantage, and as they were denied their rights to sell, fix price and distribute the fish in the market in the post-Independence period, the fisher folks organisations also demanded that their indigenous values, technologies and rights be restored.

The movement met with the resistance of the lobbies of the investors, intermediaries and Trawlers Boat Owners Association.

One result of the movement was passage of The Kerala Marine Fisheries Regulation (KMFR) Act 1981 for regulation of harvesting zones. But the Act could not be implemented properly, though the Left and Democratic government introduced welfare measures for the benefit of the fisher folks - village societies, insurance schemes, more liberal credit, housing loans, etc. The government also appointed a committee to look into the “scientific and technological issues and assess the socio-economic consequences of the fisheries management demands of the fishermen”. The committee included representatives of the small-scale fishermen’s unions, the trawler owners’ associations, apart from the representatives of administration and scientific community. The committee was chaired by Babu Paul and it was accordingly known as the Babu Paul Committee. But the committee resulted in the stalemate: fishermen’s unions gave dissenting note, and eminent scientists did not participate in it.

The fisher folks’ problems could not be solved by the legislative, administrative and political steps of the government. The KSMTF again announced launching of the monsoon movement in 1984. It raised the same demands again which were raised in the 1981 agitation. Though the movement adopted peaceful methods of mobilisation, on occasions it resulted in the clashes between fisher folks and police. The movement presented a semblance of communal harmony symbolised by the hunger strike of a Hindu fisher men and catholic nun.

The government expressed its unwillingness to ban the trawling during the monsoon period on the ground that it would result in the fall of foreign exchange and unemployment. But the NFF (National Fishermen’s Forum) suggested banning of the trawling during monsoon on experimental basis; it suggested that the help of the FAO Fisheries Division be sought for providing expertise to ban trawling on experimental basis. Rather than to accept the suggestion the government appointed another three-member committee headed by A G Kalawar (Kalawar Committee) to look into the management issues. Submitted in 1985, the Kalawar Committee did not approve the ban on shrimp harvesting during the monsoon but it suggested the reduction in the size of the trawler fleet to half of its existing strength. The committee also suggested “need to encourage the more passive shrimp harvesting gear like trammel nets which were newly introduced by the artisanal fishermen in 1983”, recommended a total ban on purse-seiner operations in coastal waters and “cautioned about the massive motorization drive

being encouraged by the Government”. The recommendations of the Kalawar Committee by and large remain unimplemented marred by the frequent changes of governments in the state.

Towards the end of the 1980s the KSMTF took up new demands:

- i) Only active fishermen should be given ownership of fishing assets,
- ii) asking the government to take legal action against the trawlers/purse- seiners under the KMFR Act.

Women played very significant role in the fisher folks’ movements in Kerala. In fact, it were the women fish vendors of Trivendram district who had launched an agitation in 1979 to demand statutory right to use public transport. As a result, within two years of the agitation, the Fisheries Department introduced special buses for them, though their statutory rights were not accepted.

In the 1990s, the fisher folks’ movement achieved the national character. There was an All-India level opposition to the introduction of the modern technology which got a boost during the liberalisation regime introduced by P V Narasingha Rao’s government. One of the issue which was opposed included DSF (Deep Sea Fishing) units. The NFF launched a national agitation through National Fishermen’s Action Council against joint Ventures of Fishers’ (NFACAJV). A *bandh* was organised on 23-24 November, 1994, which led to the closer of market and cessation of fishing. The NFACAJV also organised demonstration in the national capital, besides organising *bandhs*, demonstrations at the ports, etc. These actions caught the attention of the Government of India. The latter appointed a committee to review DSF policy in February 1994. This committee consisted of 16 members and was chaired by an retired IAS officer, P. Murari. Dissatisfied with the composition of the committee, Thomas Kocherry, now as a leader of the NFACAJV set on an 8-days hunger strike. As a result, the committee was reconstituted with inclusion of the fishermen’s representatives and increase in its strength of the committee up to 41. The Murari Committee which submitted its report in 1996 made the following major recommendations:

- 1) complete ban on fishing by foreign investors in Indian water by not issuing the new licenses and phasing out the old licenses;

The government promised to disband the DSF policy of 1991 and take steps to protect the traditional fisher folks. The NFF (1997) continued to mobilise the fisher folks throughout the 1990s and the beginning of this century in different ways aiming at generating consciousness among them.

During the recent years Fisher folks’ movement in Kerala got linked with the international movement of the fishermen in the sense that the issues raised by it were framed in the light of the report of the International Conference of Fish workers and their Supporters (ICFS) held in July 2005. These included the familiar issues — participation of the fisher folks in the fisheries and their management; sale and processing of the harvested catches, which were raised even earlier. The ICFS also recommended to the national governments to “Associate local fisher men’s organizations or fishing communities in devising and implementing regulatory measures — but with the possibility of their effective control.”



### 15.4.2 Fisher Folks' Movement of Chilika Lake : Anti-Prawn Culture Agitation

Chilika Lake was a reference point of the fisher folks' movement in 1999. Chilika Lake known for the largest brackish water in Asia, is a source of livelihood to a large number of the fisher folks of Orissa. Chilika Lake was declared as wetland of international importance by the Ramar Convention. The Lake is also habitat of a large variety of biodiversity including dolphins and different migratory birds. Since 1992 an NGO, *Orissa Krushak Mahasangh*, with Banka Bihari Das as its president had helped to organise the local fishing communities around Chilika Lake with the with the help of the Mangrove Action Project.

Tata House sought to set up a large number of industrial scale semi-intensive shrimp farms on the shore of Chilika Lake. Tata's move was stopped mid-way as result of the court injunction. The court injunction came after the hard legal battle between the Tata House and fisher folks. Though the court injunction prevented Tata's attempt to proceed, a large number of shrimp farms came to be built illegally on the Chilika shore by other groups involving mafia, politicians and bureaucrats.

The fisher folks launched an agitation against the shrimp farming in the Chilika Lake in 1999 May-July. The organisations which took lead in were *Chilika Matsyajib Mahasangh*, National Fisherworkers Forum NFF (India), World Forum for Fish-harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF). A large number of the fisher folks participated in the agitation. On June 11, 1999 the agitation took a violent turn resulting in police firing in which four fisher folks were killed and 13 were seriously injured. The fisher folks destroyed a large number of prawn farms. They formed human wall to prevent the movement of vehicles into cities, stopped the trains. The *bandh* saw maximum success in Bhubaneswar.

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## 15.5 SUMMARY

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To sum up, the fisher folks form a larger section of Indian population, especially in the coastal states — West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, etc. They contribute enormously to the domestic and international economy. They consist of diverse social and cultural groups belonging to three major religious — Hindu, Islam and Christianity. In terms of economic categories, there are broadly three groups among them — those who own their own vessels and use them them for fishing, those who do not own vessels but work on the boats and trawlers of other fisher folks, and those who own boats and travelers and employ other fisher folks. The third category also consists of the non-fisher folks, traders, politicians and moneylenders.

The fisher folks are subject to the exploitation by the moneylenders and traders. They are also worst sufferers of the natural disaster like flood, typhoons and tsunami. Since the 1990s they are facing the stiff competition with the machenised boats and trawlers, as a result of the liberalisation policy introduced by P.V. Narasingha Rao's government. Though the fisher folks have a large number of problems, the issues on which they have been mobilised into the collective actions are related to their participation in the fisheries and their management and protecting them from the competition with the machenised boats and travelers.

The fisher folks have been mobilised into collective actions from the 1960s onwards. Although fisher folks movements have been noticed in other states also, it is in Kerala that they have been most organised and sustained. It has been possible due to efforts of their leadership and organisations. Both the leadership and organisations have been existing at the district, state and national levels. In 1978 different fisher folks' unions formed a confederation known as the National Fishermen's Forum (NFF).

The leadership to the fisher folks especially in Kerala has largely been provided by the Church Fathers, nuns, social activists, intellectual-academic activists. Their collective actions have involved demonstrations, *dharnas* and hunger strikes. On several occasions their agitations resulted in violence. The government responded mainly with the appointment of commissions. The recommendations of the commissions have generally remained unimplemented. Nevertheless, the fisher folks' movements have made significant contribution to the social movements in the country.

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## 15.6 EXERCISES

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- 1) Discuss the socio-economic profile of the fisher folks and identify their main problems.
- 2) Write a note on the leadership and organisations of the fisher folks.
- 3) How do you understand the fisher folks' movements as social movements? Explain with the help of some examples.

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## UNIT 16 ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS

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### Structure

- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Environmental Movements in India: Issues and Concerns
- 16.3 The Popular Movements
  - 16.3.1 Chipko Movement
  - 16.3.2 Appiko Movemet
  - 16.3.3 Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA)
  - 16.3.4 Urban-based Environmental Movements
- 16.4 Summary
- 16.5 Exercises

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### 16.1 INTRODUCTION

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Environmental and ecological movements are among the important examples of the collective actions of several social groups. Protection and recognition of constitutional and democratic rights, which are not defined by law but form an important part of the day to day living of the subaltern masses like the control over their resources, the right of indigenous people to preserve their culture, protection of environment and maintenance of ecological balance are significant concerns of these movements, as they affect the human life to a great extent.

These movements also reflect an enlarged vision of economics and politics. Economic justice sought by these movements does not mean mere distribution of resources but encompass a larger vision like enhancement in the quality of life through recognition of people's right over their natural resources, their right to live with dignity, and their participation in the decision-making. The concerns of human environment received spectacular attention of scholars following the conclusion of the United Nations Conference on Human Environment, Stockholm in 1972. By the 1980s the "green movement" became a worldwide phenomenon encompassing various countries of the world including India. It is signified by several movements of people for the protection of their environmental and ecological rights in India, 'eco-greens' or 'green movement' in Germany and North America.

In this unit, our focus will be on environmental and ecological movements. While agrarian or working class movements have had a long historical trajectory, environmental or ecological movements gained worldwide attention only in the second half of the twentieth century. These movements focus not only on basic survival issues but also on larger ecological concerns. These are different from earlier social movements and there is need to understand them in terms of their nature and strategies.

It may be mentioned here that scholars have tried to understand and analyse these movements in diverse ways. In general these movements are grouped under tribal and peasant movements and as well under New Social movements. This is so because ecological aspects are generally associated with peasant and tribals whose survival is

associated with the state of natural resources like forests, water etc. Some treat them as middle class or elite movements as the problems and concerns of the local communities, indigenous people or non-tribal poor are generally articulated by the urban middle class elite. In fact, there has been no single unified and homogenous environmental discourse in India. There has been what Guha calls 'varieties of environmentalism'. In this context the present unit attempts to understand history of environmental movements in India. Different environmental and ecological movements will also be dealt in this unit.

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## **16.2 ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA: ISSUES AND CONCERNS**

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The environmental movement is a broad generic term which is generally used to describe and understand different types of local struggles and conflicts concerned with livelihood issues and ecological security within the larger context of the development debate. These struggles in fact critiqued and questioned the notion of development and conservation ecology pursued by the Indian state and its officials since colonial time. The genesis of the environmental movement in India can be traced to the Chipko movement (1973) in Garhwal region in the new state of Uttranchal. In fact, between 1970s and 1980s there were several struggles in India around issues of rights to forest and water which raised larger ecological concerns like rights of communities in forest resources, sustainability of large scale environmental projects like dams, issues of displacement and rehabilitation etc.

The Indian environmental movement is critical of the colonial model of development pursued by the post-colonial state. The post-independent state failed to build up a development agenda based on the needs of the people and continued to advocate the modern capitalist agenda which led to the destruction of environment, poverty and marginalisation of rural communities. Formation of national parks, sanctuaries, protected areas in India, in fact represents the conventional environmentalism which the Indian state advocated with the aim of preserving wildlife and biodiversity by pushing people out of these areas. In response to this conventional environmentalism which considered the Indian state to be the custodian of natural resources, the environmental movement in India advocated the ideology of 'environmentalism of the poor'. It not only criticised modern developmentalism but also strongly advocated the revival of traditional 'self-sufficient village economy'. It brought communities to the centre stage of Indian environmental discourse. The environmentalist stated that local communities were best suited to conserve natural resources as their survival depended in the sustainable use of such resources. They argued that in order to make the sustainable use of the resource the customary rights or traditional rights should be given back to the people which were taken away by the State, and traditional institutions should also be recognised. In a nutshell, the environmental movement in India concentrates on the issue of equity in relation to access and use of natural resources.

Unlike in the West, a significant characteristic of environmental movements in India is that they have mainly involved the women, the poor and disadvantaged masses who have been directly affected by or are victims of environmental degradation. Thus these movements are primarily political expressions of the struggle of local communities and people who are victims of environmental degradation or abuse of resources.

Gadgil and Guha identify four broad strands within the environmental movements in India based on vision, ideology and strategy. The first types are those which emphasise on the moral necessity to restrain overuse and ensure justice to the poor and marginalised. Mainly Gandhians belong to this strand. The second strand stresses on the need to dismantle the unjust social order through struggle. Marxists mostly follow this strand. The Third and fourth strands advocate reconstruction, i.e. employing technologies appropriate to the given context and time. They reflect the concerns of the scientists or the spontaneous efforts of the communities at the village level who aim at protecting local community forests or the right to pursue environment-friendly agricultural practices.

Before we discuss some examples of environmental and ecological movements in India it will be relevant to reproduce the table 10.2 from Ghanshyam Shah's book *Social Movements: A Review of Literature* (2004: 257-58). This table will help you to have an overview of the issues, categories and examples of environmental movements, which have taken place in India.

**Table 1**

Categories	Issues	Some Examples
Forest and land-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Right of access to forest resources.</li> <li>• Non-commercial use of natural resources.</li> <li>• Prevention of land degradation.</li> <li>• Social justice/human rights.</li> </ul>	Chipko, Appico, tribal movements all over the country (for example, Jharkhand/Bastar Belt).
Marine resources and fisheries, aquaculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ban on trawling, preventing commercialization of shrimp and pawn culture.</li> <li>• Protection of marine resources.</li> <li>• Implementation of coastal zone regulations.</li> </ul>	National Fishermens' Forum Working for traditional fisherfolk on Kerala, Chilka Bachao Andolan, Orissa.
Industrial pollution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stricter pollution control measures, compensation.</li> <li>• Prevention of reckless expansion of industries without considering design, locational factors and livelihood issues of local population.</li> </ul>	Zahiro Gas Morcha in Bhopal; Ganga Mukti Andolan in Bihar; movement against Harihar Polyfibre factory in Karnataka; movement against pollution of Sone river by Gwalior Rayon factory led by Vidushak Karkhana Group of Shahdol district, MP; movements against poisoning of Cheliyar river in Kerala by Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP).
Development projects: a) Dams and irrigation projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protection of tropical forests.</li> <li>• Ecological balance.</li> <li>• Destructive development.</li> <li>• Rehabilitation and resettlement of the displaced.</li> </ul>	Silent Valley movement by KSSP; Narmada Bachao Andolan; movements against Tehri by Tehri Bandh Virodhi Samiti; the Koshi Gandhak Bodhghat and Bedthi; Bhopalpatnam and Ichampalli in the west; the Tunghbhadra, Malaprabha and Ghatprabha Schemes in the south: Koyna Project affected Committee



b) Power projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ecological balance.</li> <li>• Rehabilitation and resettlement, high costs.</li> </ul>	Jan Andolan in Dabhol against Enron; Koe-Karo Jan Sanghatana in Bihar. Anti-mine project in Doon valley.
c) Mining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depletion of natural resources.</li> </ul>	Anti-Bauxite mine movement (Balco project) in Orissa.
d) Industrial plants/ Railway projects/ Airport project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land degradation.</li> <li>• Ecological imbalance.</li> <li>• Realignment.</li> <li>• Rehabilitation and resettlement of the displaced.</li> </ul>	Protests and demands of Kakana Railway Realignment Action Committee.  Citizen's group against Dupont Nylon 6.6. Goa. Amravati Bachao Abhyan against a large chemical complex.
e) Military bases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ecological balance.</li> <li>• Ecological balance.</li> <li>• Rehabilitation.</li> <li>• Resettlement and safety.</li> </ul>	Anti-missiles test range in Baliapal and at Netrahat, Bihar.
Wild-life sanctuaries. National parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Displacement, rehabilitation and resettlement, loss of livelihood.</li> </ul>	Ekjoot in Bhimashankar region of Maharashtra, Shramik Mukti Andolan in Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Bombay.
Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Displacement, cultural changes, social ills.</li> </ul>	Himachal Bachao Andolan. Bailancho Saad. Goa.
Advocacy groups/ individual campaigns, citizen's Action Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy inputs, stricter measures for protected areas.</li> <li>• Clear policy on national park and wild-life sanctuaries, lobbying, research, training and documentation on wild life, conservation, education, community-based environmental management. Publications on environmental issues.</li> </ul>	Society for Clean Cities. Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS). Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), Delhi. Research, training and documentation organizations such as Bombay Environmental Action Group. Save Bombay Committee. Save Pune Citizen's Committee, etc.
Appropriate technology/ organic farming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International debates.</li> <li>• Sustainable development. Eco-friendly models of development.</li> <li>• Low cost, environmental-friendly housing and technology.</li> </ul>	Ralegaon Siddhi (Anna Hazare's village). SOPECOMM. Laurie Baker's Housing experiments.  People's Science Institute, Dehradun.

**Source:** Janki Andharia and Chandan Sengupta. 1998. 'The Environmental Movement: Global Issues and the Indian Reality'. *The Indian Journal of Social Work*, 59 (1), pp. 429-31.

## 16.3 THE POPULAR MOVEMENTS

This section discusses some of the forest-based movements, Anti-dam movements and movements caused due to the environmental pollution. The forest-based movements discussed here include Chipko and Appico movements; the anti-Dam movement includes NBA; the anti pollution-movement include those which took place in Delhi.

### 16.3.1 Chipko Movement

As mentioned earlier, the origin of modern environmentalism and environmental movements in India can be ascribed to the Chipko movement in the central Himalayan region in the early 1970s. Chipko movement, launched to protect the Himalayan forests from destruction, has its' roots in the pre-independence days. Many struggles were organised to protest against the colonial forest policy during the early decades of 20th century. Peoples' main demand in these protests was that the benefits of the forest, especially the right to fodder, should go to local people. These struggles have continued in the post-independent era as the forest policies of independent India are no different from that of colonial ones. The origin of 'Chipko' [*chipak jayenge* - to hug] took place during 1973. In the early 1973 the forest department refused to allot ash trees to the *Dashauli Gram Swarajya Sangha* (DGSS), a local cooperative organisation based in Chamoli districts, for making agricultural implements. On the other hand, the forest department allotted ash trees to a private company, i.e., Symonds Co. This incident provoked the DGSS to fight against this injustice through lying down in front of timber trucks and burning resin and timber depots as was done in Quit India movement. When these methods were found unsatisfactory, Chandi Prasad Bhat - one of the leaders, suggested of embracing the trees and thus 'Chipko' was born (for details see Bahuguna, 1990 and Guha, 1989). This form of protest was instrumental in driving away the private company from felling the ash trees. With its success the movement spread to other neighbouring areas and subsequently the movement came to be popularly known as Chipko movement internationally. From its beginning the Chipko movement concentrated on ecological issues such as depletion of forest cover and soil erosion.

Three important aspects were responsible for the success of Chipko movement. First, the close links between the livelihoods of the local people and the nature of the movement. The local people consider Chipko as a fight for basic subsistence which have been denied to them by the institutions and policies of the State (Guha, 1989). In addition, specificity of the area where Chipko movement took place; involvement of women in the contribution to households' subsistence and the overwhelming support to anti-alcohol campaign have led to the overwhelming support of women which is unique to the Chipko movement. The second aspect is with regard to the nature of agitation. Unlike other environmental movements Chipko has strictly adhered to the Gandhian tradition of freedom struggle, i.e., non-violence. Third, the simplicity and sincerity of the leaders like Sunderlal Bahuguna and their access to national leaders like Mrs. Indira Gandhi, other politicians and officials also helped to the success of the movement to a large extent.

The demands of the Chipko movement were as follows:

- i) complete stoppage of cutting trees for commercial purposes;
- ii) the traditional rights should be recognised on the basis of minimum needs of the people;
- iii) making the arid forest green by increasing people's participation in tree cultivation;
- iv) formation of village committees to manage forests;
- v) development of the forest related home-based industries and making available the raw materials, money and technique for it; and

- vi) giving priority to afforestation in the light of local conditions, requirements and varieties.

What is distinctive about Chipko movement is that it was the forerunner as well 'as direct inspiration for a series of popular movements in defense of community rights to natural resources. Sometimes these struggles revolved around forests, in other instances, around control and use of pasture, mineral or fish resources.

### **16.3.2 Appiko Movement**

Inspired by the Chipko movement the villagers of Western Ghats, in the Uttar Kannada region of Karnataka started Appiko Chalewali movement during September – November, 1983. Here the destruction of forest was caused due to commercial felling of trees for timber extraction. Natural forests of the region were felled by the contractors which resulted in soil erosion and drying up of perennial water resources. In the Saklani village in Sirsi, the forest dwellers were prevented from collecting usufructs like twigs and dried branches and non timber forest products for the purposes of fuelwood, fodder .honey etc.They were denied of their customary rights to these products.

In September 1983, women and youth of the region decided to launch a movement similar to Chipko, in South India. Women and youth from Saklani and surrounding villages walked five miles to a nearby forest and hugged trees there. They forced the fellers and the contractors of the state forest department to stop cutting trees. The people demanded a ban on felling of green trees. The agitation continued for 38 days and this forced the state government to finally concede to their demands and withdrew the order for felling of trees. For some time government stopped felling of trees which was resumed again after some time which resumed the movement again. The movement was backed by the local people. Even the daily wage labourers hired by the contractors to fell tree stopped doing their work.

In October, the movement entered into its second phase and this took place in Bengaon forest Here the forest was of mix tropical semi-evergreen type and mostly on hilly terrain. The inhabitants of the region who were primarily tribal or the indigenous people depended on the forest for their survival and livelihood. Disappearance of bamboo due to commercial felling deprived them of the basic source to make items like baskets, mats, etc. The main source of their income was the sale these items. When felling of trees did not stop people started the movement. The movement was spontaneous in nature. The local indigenous people hugged tree to stop them from cutting and finally the government had to give in to their demands. Similar movements also started in other areas like Husri. It also inspired the local people to launch the movement.

In fact *Appiko* movement became a symbol of people's power for their rights of natural resources vis-a-vis the state. In November, the movement spread to Nidgod village in Siddapur taluka preventing the state from commercial felling of trees in this deciduous forest of the region. The Appiko movement was successful in its three fold objectives, i.e., protection of the existing forest cover, regeneration of trees in denuded lands and utilising forest wealth with proper consideration to conservation of natural resources. The movement also created awareness among the villagers throughout the Western Ghats about the ecological danger posed by the commercial and industrial interests to their forest which was the main source of sustenance. Like the Chipko, the Appiko

movement revived the Gandhian way of protest and mobilisation for sustainable society in which there is a balance between man and nature.

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

Narmada river project encompassing three major states of western India Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra is the most important case study in terms of maturation of environmental movement and dynamics related to politics of development. No other development project in India has brought into focus the intensity of magnitude of ecodevelopment problems to such a level of informed debate, political mobilisation and grass root activism as this project. The controversy which surrounded this project has challenged the government at all levels and at the same time was successful in creating and forging linkages with civil society organisation and NGOs, both at the national and international level. In fact, it has contributed to the political discourse of alternative development in India.

Sardar Sarovar Project which is a interstate multi-purpose project with a terminal major dam in Gujarat is being built on river Narmada which is the fifth largest river in India—1312 km long. The Narmada Valley Project, with its two mega projects- Sardar Sarovar Project and Narmada Sagar Project in Madhya Pradesh, is the largest single river valley project with the objective of making the world's largest man-made lake.

The consequences of the project are, however, quite glaring and alarming. The reservoir will submerge 37,000 hectares of land of which 11,000 hectares are classified as forest. It will displace about one lakh persons of 248 villages- 19 of Gujarat, 36 of Maharashtra and 193 of Madhya Pradesh. The state government initiated the project as Gujarat was one of the worst water-starved regions in India and there was drastic shortage of water for domestic, commercial, agricultural and industrial needs. Further, the state had witnessed one of the worst droughts between 1985-88 which further reinforced this project. However, according to the critics, it is seen as “the world's worst man-made ecological disaster” and it is considered unviable. It may be mentioned here that originally Narmada project was considered to be an irrigation project of a 161 feet high dam. Later it was found that water could be technologically harnessed making it a multipurpose dam if its level is raised to 455 feet. Consequently, the state governments started looking for finances not only from the centre but also from the World Bank.

Plans for damming the river at Gora in Gujarat surfaced as early as 1946. In fact, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru laid the foundation for a 49.8-meter-high dam in 1961. After studying the new maps the dam planners decided that a much larger dam would be more profitable. The only problem was hammering out an agreement with neighboring states—Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. In 1969, after years of negotiations attempting to agree on a feasible water-sharing formula, the Indian government established the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal. 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 year before submergence.

Before the Ministry of the Environment even cleared the Narmada Valley Development Projects in 1987, the World Bank sanctioned a loan for \$450 million for the largest dam, the Sardar Sarovar, in 1985. In actuality, construction on the Sardar Sarovar dam site had continued sporadically since 1961, but began in earnest in 1988. Questions arose

concerning the promises about resettlement and rehabilitation programme set up by the government. As a consequence, each state had a people's organisation which addressed these concerns. Soon, these groups came together to form the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), or, the Save the Narmada Movement under the leadership Medha Patekar , a social activists.

It may be mentioned here that the NBA began as a fight for information about the Narmada Valley Development Projects but developed as a fight for just rehabilitation for the lakhs of people to be ousted by the Sardar Sarovar Dam and other large dams along the Narmada river. Eventually, when it became clear that the magnitude of the project precluded accurate assessment of damages and losses, and that rehabilitation was impossible, the movement challenged the very basis of the project and questioned its claim to development.

In 1988, the NBA demanded formally the stoppage all work on the Narmada Valley Development Projects. In September 1989, more than 50,000 people gathered in the valley from all over India to pledge to fight "destructive development." A year later thousands of villagers walked and boated to a small town in Madhya Pradesh to reiterate their pledge to drown rather than agree to move from their homes. Under intense pressure, the World Bank was forced to create an independent review committee, the Morse Commission. It published its report the Morse Report in 1992. The report "endorsed all the main concerns raised by the Andolan (NBA). Two months later, the Bank sent out the Pamela Cox Committee. It also known as suggested exactly what the Morse Report advised against: "a sort of patchwork remedy to try and salvage the operation". Eventually, due to the international uproar created by the Report, the World Bank withdrew from the Sardar Sarovar Project. In response, the Gujarati government decided to raise \$200 million and go ahead with the project.

Many issues of the project are yet unresolved. However, what is more important is that the Movement has been successful a considerable extent. The achievements of the movements include:

- Exit of the World Bank from Sardar Sarovar in 1993
- Halt of Sardar Sarovar construction 1994-99
- Withdrawal of foreign investors from Maheshwar dam 1999-2001

The NBA is unique in the sense that it underlined the importance of people's right to information which the authorities finally had to concede under media and popular pressure. It was successful not only in mobilising hundreds of thousands people from different walks of life to put pressure on the State government for its anti-people policies ,affecting and displacing lakhs of tribals from their homes and livelihoods. It also received immense international support. Resorting to non-violent mode of protest and following Gandhian vision of constructive work, NBA, as its popularly known is distinctive landmark in the history of environmentalism in India. However, in the face of recalcitrant attitude of the governments, the NBA continues with the involvement of effected people and civil society organisations.



### 16.3.4 Urban-based Environmental Movements

In the recent past environmental pollution caused due the industrialisation has become the focus of collective action by the civil society organisations, NGOs, concerned individuals, especially lawyers, scientists, environmentalists and social activists. They sought the intervention of the judiciary and drew the attention of the state for showing concern to the pollution caused by the process of modernisation. However, the main focus of the collective action against pollution has been in the urban areas. Certain tragedies like gas leakage in Bhopal based Union Carbide MNC, Charnobyl in former Soviet Union where thousands of people were killed created worries among the people on the negative effect of the industrialisation. Though the 1990s have seen increased concern about the environmental pollution, awareness about the disastrous impact of the environmental pollution started growing in the 1960s. All the major cities of India are facing acute air, water and other kinds on environmental pollution. Continuous immigration of the people from rural areas into the cities, their habitat in the congested areas which exist along with the polluting small scale industries; increasing number of vehicles; and unplanned expansion of cities, open drainage, etc. have created levels environmental hazards. This pollution made people susceptible to multiple diseases.

The protection of environment did not form significant part of the policies of the state. The Nehruvian model gave more emphasis to the industrialisation without showing much concern for the pollution it was going create. However, in 1976 an Constitutional Amendment called upon the state “to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forest and wildlife of the country” and made the fundamental duty of every citizen “to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures”. In the following decades the state passed legislations to prevent air pollution and environmental protection like The Air Act of 1981 and Environmental Protection Act of 1986. The judiciary has become the arbiter of people’s rights which include their protection from the environmental protection also since the emergence of the device of the Public Interest Litigation ( PIL). In the face of indifference of the executive and legislature about the people’s problems, the PIL has become an effective weapon through which people seek the intervention of the state on these issues. The intervention of the judiciary forced the state to introduce some measures for prevention of environmental pollution. Justice Krishna Iyer, Justice Kuldeep Singh and advocate MC Mehta have made remarkable contribution in protection of the environment.

Delhi is one of the most polluted cities in the world. Three issues related to the environmental pollution have been focus of activities of some concerned of the civil society components in the recent past. These are air pollution caused due to the vehicular and industrial pollution and water pollution in Yamuna river. The number of private and public vehicles has increased many fold in the recent past. This has polluted the environment and made people, especially children and old vulnerable to multiple diseases. Reacting to the court order which was result of a PIL, the government made it compulsory to introduce the CNG vehicles and make the pollution check mandatory for all private vehicles. The introduction of the CNG vehicles has resulted in the reduction of the environmental pollution in the city. Similarly, the Delhi government has been force to shift the polluting industries out of the city and launch the Yamuna river cleaning operation. The closing down of the polluting factories and industries proved the labour

unrest in the city. It resulted in the police firing, which killed one labourer. In fact, this is related to the unplanned development policy. The migration to the cities from the villages is inevitable. Unless some measures are adopted to absorb the migrating population, and increasing usage of the vehicles is stopped, it seems the environmental pollution will remain.

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## **16.4 SUMMARY**

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To sum up, environmental and ecological movements became prominent in India since the 1970s, like other such movements. The concerns of these movement are not confined to any particular groups. They are all encompassing – the entire village and urban communities, women, tribals, peasants, middle classes and nature. Even the issues raised by them concern all sections of society in varying degrees. These issues are: protection of people's right to access of natural resources, prevention of land degradation, preventing commercialisation of nature resources and environmental pollution, maintenance of ecological balance, rehabilitation of displaced people, etc. These issues are also related to people's dignity, environmental rights and their decision-making rights on the issues concerning them.

The state in collaboration with the donor agencies disturbed the ecological balance in the society following independence. In the process this adversely affected the people. The latter launched environmental and ecological movement with their leadership, NGOs and other civil society organisations. These movements have raised the levels of people's consciousness, and achieved some success. They form a significant aspect of democracy in India.

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## **16.5 EXERCISES**

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- 1) Highlight the main issues and concerns of the environmental movements in India.
- 2) Discuss the main feature of the Chipko movement.
- 3) Write a note on Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA).
- 4) In your opinion, how are the environmental and ecological rights related to democracy and development in India? Explain.

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## UNIT 17 SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND DEMOCRACY: AN ASSESSMENT

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### Structure

- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2 Meaning of Democracy
  - 17.2.1 Ingredients of Democracy
- 17.3 Limitations of Formal Democracy
- 17.4 Mass Politics and Mass Movements
- 17.5 Democracy and Social Transformation in India
- 17.6 Rising Expectations, Frustration and Democratic System
- 17.7 Movements and Democratisation
- 17.8 Movements Against Democracy
- 17.9 Summary
- 17.10 Exercises

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### 17.1 INTRODUCTION

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Having studied various social movements in India, we shall now examine relationship between democracy and social movements. Our purpose is to assess the role and significance of social movements in democratic political system. Do the movements strengthen and invigorate democracy? In other words do the movements make democracy more effective to attain its objectives? Or do social movements hamper functioning of democracy?

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### 17.2 MEANING OF DEMOCRACY

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Though democracy is much talked and has become universal aspiration of people, different scholars and political leaders interpret it differently. Some scholars use adjective 'true' before the word democracy. In their opinion the present democracy is not true. If it is not true, why should it be called 'democracy'? The word democracy is often used loosely. Political leaders of different ideologies and missions use the word democracy to suit their actions which include even imprisonment of rivals, genocide of 'other' ethnic community and violation of human rights. Recently the United State of America waged war on Iraq to establish 'democracy' there. Many dictators claim that they were working for democracy – for the welfare of the people. As a result the term creates more fire than heat or add to confusion in our understanding. Let us see some of the widely use definition:

- “Democracy comes from the Greek words *demos* meaning ‘people’ and *kratos* meaning ‘authority’ or ‘power’.”
- Democracy is government of the people, for the people and by the people.
- “The word ‘democracy’ itself means ‘rule by the people’. A democracy is a system where people can change their rulers in a peaceful manner and the government is given the right to rule because the people say it may.

- “...government which is conducted with the freely given consent of the people.”
- “...a system of government in which supreme authority lies with the people.”
- “Rule by the people in a country directly or by representation.”
- “The form of government in which political control is exercised by all the people, either directly or through their elected representatives.”

In the above definitions ‘people’ are central in the democratic system. But people are not homogeneous. In a stratified society there are some people who are economically, socially and politically very powerful. And on the other hand, many people are powerless. They depend on the powerful for their economic survival. People of different social and economic strata have different interests. They have different life chances. Their perception of the system differs. In such a stratified and plural society the term ‘people’ become complex and elusive.

### **17.2.1 Ingredients of Democracy**

Democracy has three essential and overlapping ingredients. They are: (1) political institutions; (2) political processes, and (3) substantial functioning. In democratic system political institutions such as electoral system and legislature provide scope and necessary mechanism to citizens to participate directly or indirectly in decision making processes. They elect their representatives to form the government which takes decisions on behalf of the people for society as a whole. These representatives execute their decisions through various agencies like bureaucracy, police and military. They enjoy authority over societal resources and their management. When the citizens are not satisfied with their representatives in their functioning, decisions and use of power, people change them and elect other representatives. In that sense people have final authority who should manage the state and society. This is a formal institutional aspect of democracy.

The elected representatives cannot rule society according to their whims. Rule of law is an essential component of the democratic system. That means that the rulers/representatives are not above law. The representatives exercise their power and take decisions within the Constitutional framework – written or by convention- that spells out their power and responsibility. In democracy political power of any one institution is not absolute. Different institutions maintain check on each other. It is a system of checks and balances. The rulers are the representatives of the people and are accountable to people for decisions and management of social affairs. Political institutions are mechanism to attain the substantive objectives of the system –serving common good. The functioning of these institutions therefore has to be transparent so that people can judge and differentiate between right and wrong.

Democracy without politics is body without soul. Politics means conflict and struggle of interests and ideologies. Politics is concerned with control over resources, their use and distribution. It involves debates and decisions on identifying priorities in policy making regarding use of resources and generation of surplus. It is a system in which different points of views and ideological formations on societal matters contest with each other. They compete for power and influence political decisions. It involves the process of monitoring political institutions and policy makers as well as the executive.

Mere elections and government of elected representative do not make the political system democratic. Democracy in substance does not mean number game: rule of, for and by majority. It cannot be called democratic system if the government by majority vote prevents dissent and opposition parties or majority wipes out minority communities or prevents them to follow their religion. In democratic system, management or governance is hinged on certain basic moral, social and political principles – not only to protect but also to enlarge secular and humane interests.

Objectives of the political institutions are to cater to the needs and aspirations of the people. It should function and aim at ‘development’ of all; and not one or small section of society. In that sense democratic system in ‘developing’ societies in the Third world, is a process of social transformation so that all citizens can participate in the system with equal capacity. Social and economic equality is therefore the core of effective and viable democracy. Besides other principles and objectives, equality before laws is necessary but not sufficient condition for free and equal participation of all people in decision-making process, particularly those who are at lower and most exploited strata. Inequality in substance hampers effective functioning of the political system. Such a situation has potentiality to reduce democratic institutions as a game of musical chair limited to those who have money and muscle strength. Greater inequality results into lesser possibilities for effective and meaningful participation of the deprived section(s) in political processes. Their vulnerability in social, cultural and economic spheres provide them less space to be equal with those who are in upper echelon in production and reproduction system. Capacity of the powerful to manipulate choices of the vulnerable is related to the extent of gap between the two. Wider inequality tends to provide less opportunity to the deprived for asserting their needs and rights. For the health of the democratic system an ideal of ‘equal capabilities’ needs to be translated into reality. Dr. Ambedkar rightly emphasised before the Constituent Assembly, “We must make our democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy. What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles of liberty, equality and fraternity are not to be treated as separate items in trinity. They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy...”.

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### **17.3 LIMITATIONS OF FORMAL DEMOCRACY**

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Institutions are mechanism to attain certain objectives. Their structures in terms of composition of membership, organisational system locating power and responsibilities/duties, control over resources, procedures for functioning to take decisions and carrying out responsibilities – are formed in context of time and objectives. The institutions that may carry out functions ‘successfully’ at particular point of time, may not succeed at different points of time. This might be because the objectives for which the institutions were created, no longer remain important in the new situations. Or the forces outside the institutions have changed and the institutional mechanism is not able to handle them. For instance, the system of two houses in England played very important role till the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century not only to keep check on each other but also to maintain certain continuity in society and get wisdom from aristocratic and professional classes. But over a period of time the upper house becomes redundant and ornamental. Or take another example, two party system which succeeded in accommodating existing interests



and providing stability in the early phase of democratic system now fails to represent all the plural and divergent interests that have emerged with further democratisation of society. No institutional structure and procedures are foolproof to meet all situations. One, sometimes they are not able to meet the changing situation and may hinder in new circumstances rather than help in attaining the objectives for which they have been created. Two, any institution cannot be perfect to meet all eventualities. Three, institutions may sometimes bog down to procedures and lose sight of the main objectives. Or they remain confined to procedures, which may not be conducive to the objectives. For example, election system is created to meet people's views, expectations and preferences to elect their representatives; but it may not provide opportunity to people to elect such representative who can in true sense represent their hopes.

Institutions are important but not always enough in attaining substantial aspect of politics. They provide limited choice to the people. Social movements build pressure on policy makers for reforming institutions, create new institutions, keep check on abuse of power and demonstrate needs and expectations of people. Social movements provide avenue for social transformation, which is the objective of democracy. Moreover, as David Bayley argues that public protests have a certain 'functional utility' even in a parliamentary form of government. They keep the rulers on their toe. They also provide safety valve where people express their grievances. That gives warning to the government against rising dissatisfaction and forces; and leads to take remedial measures. Hence, social movements are complementary to democracy.

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## **17.4 MASS POLITICS AND MASS MOVEMENTS**

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Some social scientists like by William Kornhauser, Robert Nisbet, Edward Shils argue that democratic system has evolved various institutions to manage societal affairs on behalf of the people. The system provides opportunities to express their desires, grievances and problems to their representatives through periodical elections. People can change their representatives in elections. But according to these scholars direct collective actions in the forms of mass movement is 'anti-democratic'. Such movements bring unnecessary pressure on the elected representatives and hamper efficient functioning of the political institutions. The government is often pulled in different directions and forced to take policy decisions under pressures rather than merits of the issues. This paves way to populist politics. Therefore, these scholars are in favour of excluding movements from democratic system. In the 1950s and 1960s some Indian scholars who approved of the agitation for independence from foreign rule, did not approve of agitations in the post-Independence period. They condemned them outright as 'dangerous' and 'dysfunctional' for 'civilized society'. One of them argued, 'One can understand, if not justify the reasons which led the people in a dependent country to attack and destroy everything which was a symbol or an expression of foreign rule. But it is very strange that people should even now behave as if they continue to live in a dependent country ruled by foreigners'. they blame the opposition parties, leaders and trade unions for instigating the masses to direct action.

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## **17.5 DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN INDIA**

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The functioning of democratic system during the last five decades has brought certain positive transformation in our traditionally hierarchical society. Brahminial framework

of social order has been de-legitimised. Rule of law, equal citizenship, social and economic equality have been codified in legal system and are accepted moral principles to be maintained and attained. In the process, political positions are no longer the sole prerogative of upper castes – brahmins, rajputs and banias. In several regions their proportion in seat of power has sharply declined. Middle and lower castes have challenged their power. A group though tiny, from the lowest social strata, dalits and tribals have also emerged as political elite and get some share in decision-making of the state. They do play important, sometimes decisive role in formation of government. Similarly women though in a microscopic minority have also begun to share political power and assert their rights. Thus circle of political elite has enlarged.

One of the most striking positive contributions of the system is that people from lower strata participate in electoral processes and exercise their franchise. They express their needs, expectations, grievances and also anger against those who hold offices and desire for the change. Through their votes they often throw out from power one set of political leaders and parties, and bring others with a hope that the alternative would be better. No one can take electorate for granted as far as holding of power is concerned. In that sense the elected representatives are 'accountable'. They are compelled to take consent of the people at least once in five years. The system has provided a space for dissent and that space is a hope for further transformation. In order to get votes once in five years political leaders do resort to gimmicks and so called 'populist' politics which may be lollipop. A few –handful number of people do get some crumbs. This facilitates in perpetuating hope that some day all will get share in benefits and improve their lots.

Democratic system has also created various institutions that to some extent maintain checks on each other. Legal mechanism provides freedom to express opposite views and expose misdeeds of rulers. Pressures on the state are built for accountability of their actions. These provisions and scope for assertion and change by themselves are important, though not sufficient. Legal provisions and institutional mechanism can be subjected to distortion and can be used to subvert democratic space. In fact, institutional ethos and mechanism are increasingly getting eroded for personal power and interests. Democracy has become a game of few irrespective of caste, gender and religion who have or could manipulate muscle and money power to perpetuate their personal interests. For their power they ignore and break all norms of democracy. Criminalisation has increased in politics unabated. The present Westminster model of democracy has been manipulated to perpetuate dominance of the propertied classes. It seems whatever changes in society that the present system could bring have reached to plateau and now it moves towards diminishing return.

After fifty years of democratic system only 40 per cent of the population enjoys basic amenities such as potable water, education and health. One fifth of the households still live in a state of 'abject', or a 'moderate' state of deprivation, such as too little drinking water, *pucca* (brick) house and literacy, not to speak of access to health services. The quality of these services and satisfaction with them are far from being at a desirable level.

In the midst of certain improvements in certain social service sectors there are also some disturbing reversals. Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) has almost stagnated in the last decade. The nutrition level and calorie intake of the poor have decline. Almost 12 million people suffer from Vitamin A deficiency. Nearly fifty per cent of the children in age

group of between 0 to 3 years suffer from malnutrition. Wages of the farm and non-farm sector workers in different parts of the country have not increased in correspondence with rising prices. Hence the purchasing capacity of such workers has remained as low as in the 1980s. Despite a surplus of 65 million tons food grains, some 320 million people go to bed hungry every night. In 2004, deaths from starvation have been reported in several states like Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Inequality across the social/occupational groups has not declined, in fact, it has increased during the last decade. Along with this, discrimination based on gender and social status has also increased. There is a striking decline in female-male ratio among children, from 945 girls per 1000 boys (in the 0-6 age group) in 1991 to 927 girls per 1000 boys in 2001. Domestic violence to women shows no sign of decline. The practice of dowry has increased in various social groups where it never existed in the past. Similarly, atrocities against the dalits, tribals and minorities have increased.

Economic growth in industrial sector has been high and has accelerated in the last decades under neo-liberal economy. But high growth rate has not benefited the poor even to meet their basic human needs. It is by and large a jobless growth with increasing dismantling of the organised sector. Markets have not evolved safety networks for the workforce and large section of the population is without social and economic security. The Report on *'Human development in South Asia'*, points out that overall focus of the Multilateral organisations working in the region is focused more on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth and balancing budgets, than on the reduction of poverty. The governments have not adopted job creation as an explicit policy commitment.

During the last five decades of the democratic system many poor have lost their traditional resources of livelihood which used to provide them some relief to cope up with misery. Common resources like common-land, forest and water have been increasingly grabbed by the dominant classes and musclemen. In the name of so-called development the State has also take away from many tribal and non-tribal farmers their land and habitat. The victims have been forced to endorse the decisions of the government. Alternative avenues though sometimes promised have remained on paper or provided to a few. Most of the other victims of the development have been left high and dry. Most of the promises that the Indian Constitution on which Republic is founded have so far remained unfulfilled. Article 21 promises the right to live with dignity. Article 41 directs the State to make effective provisions for securing the Right to work, education and public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement. Article 45 also directs the State to provide within a period of 10 years from the commencement of the Constitution, free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14. People vote in every election with the expectation that their representatives would sincerely fulfil these promises.

Ironically, democracy is used to perpetuate power of few to decide the destiny of all. The system has been reduced to electoral engineering that works as a safety valve for vast majority of people to ventilate their grievances and reinforce their faith that something better would be done to them by the new representatives – different political parties. Majority of the people feels helpless as they have no other way but to put faith in the system as they put faith in God – that almighty would improve their lots. The elected representatives follow the dicta of the multinational and domestic dominant classes for making economic policy which grabs their traditional sources of livelihood and security

on the one hand and generates more and more unemployment and social insecurity. People have no democratic choice in influencing economic policy of the state. As K.C. Suri in his article in *Economic And Political Weekly*, has shown with empirical data of 2004 elections that vast majority of the people do not want privatisation of health, education, water, forest etc. They demand equitable distribution of assets, secured jobs and share in benefits generated by growth. The present day development model, as C. Douglas Lummis in his book *Radical Democracy* observes is “antidemocratic in several ways. It is antidemocratic in that it requires kinds, conditions, and amounts of labor that people would never choose- and, historically, never have chose-in a state of freedom. Only by giving a society one or another kind of undemocratic structure can people be made to spend the greater part of their lives labouring ‘efficiently’ in fields, factories, or offices and handing over the surplus value to capitalists, managers, communist party leaders, or technocrats”. Nearly two decades back Rajni Kothari rightly observed: “Today the state is seen to have betrayed masses, as having become a prisoner of the dominant classes and their transnational patrons and as having increasingly turned anti-people. Nor has it provided the sinews of a radical bourgeois transformation from the dynamics of which a revolutionary alternative would emerge. The state in the Third World, despite some valiant efforts by dedicated leaders in a few countries, has degenerated into technocratic machine serving a narrow power group that is kept in power by holders of security men at the top and a regime of repression and terror at the bottom, kept going by millions of hardworking people who must go on producing goods and services for the ‘system’ for if they did not everything would collapse”.

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## **17.6 RISING EXPECTATIONS, FRUSTRATION AND DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM**

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Number and coverage of social movements in different forms have increased in all societies including in democratic system. This is primarily because the rising aspirations of the people are not adequately met by existing political institutions which are rigid or incompetent. Many scholars such as Huntington, Rajni Kothari and several others observe that as the gap between expectations of people and performance of the system widens mass upsurge in the forms of movements increase. Alain Touraine and Jurgen Habermas argue that democratic system in post-modern society is not able to guarantee individual freedom, equality and fraternity. In the view of these theorists, democracy is degenerating into an authoritarian, technocratic state. The state in turn has become subjugated to market forces. The state’s technocracy and the forces of the market thus dominate people. There are no longer workers, but only consumers. The old class of workers has ceased to be a class in production process. Instead people’s main social role has become that of consumers. In this role, people are manipulated entirely by the market. For Habermas, social movements are seen as defensive reactions to defend the public and the private sphere of individuals against the inroads of the state system and market economy.

While highlighting limitations of parliamentary democracy in India A.R. Desai argued in 1960s:

“The parliamentary form of government, as a political institutional device, has proved to be inadequate to continue or expand concrete democratic rights of the people. This form, either operates as a shell within which the authority of capital perpetuates itself,

obstructing or reducing the opportunities for people to consciously participate in the process of society, or is increasingly transforming itself into a dictatorship, where capital sheds some of its democratic pretensions and rules by open, ruthless dictatorial means. Public protests will continue till people have ended the rule of capital in those countries where it still persists. They will also continue against those bureaucratic totalitarian political regimes where the rule of capital has ended, but where due to certain peculiar historical circumstances Stalinist bureaucratic, totalitarian political regimes have emerged. The movements and protests of people will continue till adequate political institutional forms for the realization and exercise of concrete democratic rights are found.”

Rajni Kothari also believes that ‘democracy’ in India has become a playground for growing corruption, criminalisation, repression and intimidation of large masses of the people. “There is discontent and despair in the air—still highly diffuse, fragmented and unorganised. But there is a growing awareness of rights, felt politically and expressed politically, and by and large still aimed at the State. Whenever a mechanism of mobilisation has become available, this consciousness has found expression, often against very heavy odds, against a constellation of interests that are too powerful and complacent to shed (even share) the privileges. At bottom it is consciousness against a paradigm of society that rests on deliberate indifference to the plight of the impoverished and destitute who are being driven to the threshold of starvation—by the logic of the paradigm itself.” In such a scenario mass mobilisation at the grassroots level is both necessary and desirable. Electoral system, political parties and established trade unions do not provide space to the masses to bring social transformation. “In their place there is emerging a new arena of counteraction, of countervailing tendencies, of counter-cultural movements and more generally of a counter-challenge to existing paradigms of thought and action’.

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## **17.7 MOVEMENTS AND DEMOCRATISATION**

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As we have seen above that many scholars believe that social movements play positive role in democracy in different ways. One, social movements are the outcome of people’s political consciousness. It is an expression of people’s consciousness for asserting their demands. Two, social movements encourage participation of people on political issues. While articulating agenda of the struggle the leaders discuss/explain various aspects of the issues with the participants. Such process of discourse also contribute in developing and sharpening consciousness of the people. Political participation and consciousness of the people are backbones of democracy. Third, success and effectiveness of social movements depend on extent of mobilisation. Greater mobilisation tends to expand political horizon and lead to further democratisation of society. Fourth, Social movements express aspirations, needs and demands of the people who can only assert through collective action and become effective. They keep the policy makers on toe and accountable of their decisions. Fifth, number of social movements influence policy makers and compel them to enact laws to meet their demands – advancing or protect their interests. The followings are illustrations.

In unit 13 you have learnt about various agrarian movements in the pre and post Independence period. During the 1920s and 1930s there were number of peasant movements in different parts of the country. Some of them were spontaneous of local peasants and some were organised by Kisan Sabha, Gandhians and left parties. These movements were against the landlords demanding land to the tenants/share croppers/



tillers. In several places the demand was for abolition of forced labour. Such movements influenced the Congress party, which led the freedom movement. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru observed, "the growth of the National movement under the leadership of the Congress, resulted in the peasant masses joining the Congress and looking to it for relief from their many burdens. This increased the power of the Congress greatly and at the same time it gave it a mass outlook. While the leadership remained middle class, this was tempered by pressure from below, and agrarian and social problems occupied the Congress more and more... The struggle for independence began to mean something much more than political freedom, and social content was given to it". The Congress Manifesto of 1946 declared that "The reform of the land system which was urgently needed in India involves the removal of intermediaries between the peasant and the state". Soon after Independence several state/provincial government initiated action to enact laws for the abolition of the intermediary interests in land. Zaminadari system, forced labour etc. were made illegal.

However, these laws were not implemented with speed and efficiently in most of the states. By the late 1950s series of poor peasant movements took place in different parts of the country against landlords and rich peasants. Most effective and widespread movement was Naxabari, which began in West Bengal and spread in many parts of the country. In the 1960s socialist and Left parties organised land grab movements. There were also number of grassroots movements of agricultural laborers demanding higher wages and distribution of surplus land. In order to pacify these classes and woo them in elections, Indira Gandhi gave a slogan of "garibi hatao"; and formulated number of programmes for eradication of poverty. However, movements of the poor peasants and laborers have not been widespread and strong since 1970s.

In the 1920s Dr. Ambedkar organised number of movements of dalits against untouchability which included temple entry, use of water from public tank, use of public roads etc. In 1930s he launched a movement for separate electorate. Gandhi and Hindus opposed it. Gandhi then went on fast against the demands of dalits. That led to famous Poona Pact between Gandhi and Ambedkar. As a result Gandhi had accepted reserved seats, and Ambedkar had accepted a joint electorate. This struggle influenced the later events. M.S. Gore notes, "One wonders whether without the Poona fast and the subsequent emphasis that Gandhi gave to untouchability work, there would have been a sufficient change of opinion by 1947 for the Constituent Assembly to have declared untouchability to stand abolished, to have provided for reserved seats for 'scheduled castes' in the legislatures for a period of ten years to begin with and to have agreed to the provision of special protective measure for them. It is equally possible that without Ambedkar's protest and astute leadership, there would neither have been the Poona fast and pact nor the subsequent churning of public opinion."

One can assess similar kind of impact of movements such as of women, adivasis, organised working class etc. on formation of state policies on different issues. Regional and ethnic movements of Nagas and Mizos, people of Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand etc. resulted into formation of linguistic or ethnic states. The Navnirman movement of 1974 in Gujarat on the issue of corruption in general and of political corruption in particular resulted into the change of the government. The ministers and members of the state assembly were forced to resign.

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## 17.8 MOVEMENTS AGAINST DEMOCRACY

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However, it should be emphasised that all social movements per se do not necessarily lead to more democratisation. As you have read in unit 3 of this course, there are types and types of social movements varying from protest to rebellion and revolutionary; and different movements have different ideologies. History has witnessed in India and elsewhere that some social movements oppose social transformation. They may be called counter-movements. People are mobilised to resist change coming from the oppressed sections of society. Anti-reservation agitation in 1980s is a case in point. The upper caste students were against the reservation for the Scheduled castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other backward castes. They launched agitation and succeeded to some extent in preventing the government for the implementation of reservation policy for the OBCs. The movement for *Ramjanma Bhumi* and *Hindu Rastra* is another example. It may be noted that Hitler, the architect of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, mobilised Germans in 1930s against Jews, Communists and liberals. With demagogic virtuosity, he "played on national resentments, feelings of revolt and the desire for strong leadership using all the most modern techniques of mass persuasion to present himself as Germany's redeemer and messianic savior." He then captured power through elections.

Rajni Kothari does not justify all types of 'direct actions'. He said in 1960 that the action is desirable 'only if the political change desired by the group involved in direct action offers a greater scope of political freedom than is offered by the existing political arrangement'. As discussed in Unit 2 Gandhi who championed 'protest' against injustice and misrule was against violent movements. He warned that "...if disobedience is carried out in the style of duragra, and not within the framework of satyagraha, it may well lead to widespread indifference to legality and lead itself to those who would use illegal tactics to undermine faith in democratic processes". It may be mentioned that Gandhi withdrew Civil disobedience movement after the Chauri Chaura incident which became violent. He feared that such mob violence might repeat in other places and the Congress was not able to control and direct the masses. Bipan Chandra has recently argued in his book *In the Name of Democracy* (JP movement and Emergency) that JP movement had 'undefined goal, loose organisation and confusion in its ideology. JP was not able to provide democratic direction to the movement. "Far from saving democracy, the movement was responsible for actually putting it in danger without leading to any long-term political gains... Emergency brought the country to the verge of long-term dictatorship." In other words social movements without clarity of ideology and organisation may prove counter-productive. It can be used by the forces which have no faith in democracy.

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## 17.9 SUMMARY

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Democracy and social movements are closely linked like two sides of the same coin. Social movements are the expression of collective will. It is soul of democracy – expression of people's grievances against the system, their needs and aspirations; and their desire to get involved in political processes. And without people's politics democracy is a form without substance. The present functioning of the democratic system in India and elsewhere do not reflect will of the majority of the population. Most of the parties

are functioning without democratic decision-making process within them. Elections have become rituals that do not provide adequate alternative choice to the people. More important, people's wishes are not taken into account in forming economic decision. The part of economic development is antidemocratic. People ventilate and articulate their aspirations and opinion through collective actions in the forms of social movements. The movements keep political leaders on their toe and build pressure on government. Some of the movements have to some extent succeeded in enhancing democratisation in society, mobilising and politicising the people to take part in decision making processes. They have also to some extent influenced public policy in their favour. However, all social movements do not necessarily lead to greater democratisation. Nature of social movements in terms of their goals, ideologies, organisational structures and programmes play important role in strengthening or otherwise of democracy.

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### **17.10 EXERCISES**

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- 1) Discuss the main components of democracy and explain why is politics central in democracy?
- 2) Analyse working of democratic system in India. According to you does it meet the expectations of majority of the people? Why do you say so?
- 3) Why are social movements important in democratic system?
- 4) Do all social movements enhance democratic process? If not why?