

5. Social Movements in India

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5.1


MEANING AND NATURE OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Meaning and Definitions

The term Social Movement was introduced by the German Sociologist Lorenz Von Stein in the book, '*History of the French Social Movement from 1789 to the Present*' in the year 1850. It became popular in the European discourse in the early 19th century. There is no single definition of a social movement. Different Sociologists have highlighted varying constituents of social movements in varying contexts.

 **Turner and Killian :** A collectivity acting with some continuity to promote or resist a change in the society or group of which it is a part.

 **Herbert Blumer :** Collective enterprises to establish a new order of life.

 **Sidney Tarrow :** Collective challenges to authority, established cultural codes by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interactions with elites, opponents and authorities.

Characteristics of Social Movements

Social Movements are different in nature, features, pace and operations. The important characteristics of social movements are as follows :

(1) Essentially collective in nature : Social movement is not an individual action.

It involves a collective action. A group collectivity has to be part of the movement.

(2) Planned and deliberate action : Social movements have to be preplanned to be executed effectively. Movements are deliberate initiatives and not spontaneous in nature.

(3) Ideology and objectives : A social movement is backed by an ideology. The ideology guides the course of the movement. It has a set of objectives to fulfill.

(4) Social change : Social movements are oriented towards bringing about a change. It usually demands change in the already established order or it resists change initiated by the authorities.

Types of Social Movements

Collective actions like protests, agitations, rebellions, resistances and even riots are understood as forms of social mobilisation. However, these actions differ from social movements.

Social movements can be classified in various ways using different criteria. All the classifications are based on scope, objectives and operations.

(a) Cultural Anthropologist David Aberle has identified four kinds of social movements, based on two criteria what is the target group for change and how much change is advocated. The types are: Alternative Social Movements, Reformatory Social Movements, Redemptive Social Movements, and Revolutionary Social Movements.

(b) Herbert Blumer has classified social movements into three major categories : General social movements, Specific social movements and Expressive social movements.

Social Reform Movement in India :

Social reform has continued throughout our Indian history. However organised social movements for reform started since the 19th century. These movements were especially driven by the intelligentsia of society and included stalwarts such as Raja Rammohan Roy, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Mahatma Jotiba Phule, Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj, Maharshi Karve, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi and so on.

These movements made efforts to promote change in various ways. They covered a wide range of areas such as religion, caste, women's empowerment, untouchability, exploitation of the poor, farmers' issues etc. We shall briefly examine the significant contributions of some of these reformers.

- **Raja Rammohan Roy** in 1828, through the *Brahmo Samaj*, took up religious, social and educational reforms and began a crusade against the practice of Sati. The abolition of Sati Act in 1829 is a result of his efforts.

- **Swami Dayanand Saraswati** through the *Arya Samaj* (1875) rejected caste system, idol worship and superstitions. He strived for the progress of women and eradication of illiteracy.

- **Mahatma Jotiba Phule** established the *Satya Shodhak Samaj* in 1873. He was deeply concerned with women's issues - education, widow remarriage and prohibition

of child marriage. His wife, Savitribai Phule also worked alongside for the emancipation of women.

- **Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj** was the ruler of the princely state of Kolhapur (1874-1922). He was a broad minded visionary and a dedicated social reformer. He vehemently attacked the caste system and worked ceaselessly for the cause of 'untouchables'.

- **Maharshi Karve** was known for his efforts to promote the education of women. In 1907 he started the Mahila Vidyalaya and in 1916, the Karve Women's University (now renamed SNDT University).

- **Dr. B. R. Ambedkar** a jurist, an economist and a reformer, worked against discrimination of the marginalised categories. His slogan, "Educate, organise, agitate" inspired millions of people. The Depressed Classes Education Society was established by him in 1928.

- **Mahatma Gandhi** was a lawyer and political leader. He employed non-violent resistance to lead the successful campaign for India's Independence. He led a nationwide campaign for eradicating poverty, expanding women's rights and building religious tolerance. His mission was to end untouchability and achieve swaraj (self-rule). He is regarded as 'The Father of the Nation' and is affectionately called *Bapu*.

Causes of Social Movements

The emergence of social movements may be due to various factors. Considering the fact that society is a continuously growing organism; the emergence of a social movement can be attributed to the following causal situations:

(1) Cultural Drift : A cultural drift may imply rapid change in values, ideas and

expectations in society. When the gap between what is expected and what is accepted widens beyond the permissible range in a given society, conflict emerges, resulting in the possibility of a social movement.

(2) Social Disorganisation : Different processes of change like industrialisation, urbanisation etc. may lead to uneven and unequitable growth in society. New norms

can clash with the already established norms. Existence of old as well as new norms in the society at the same point of time can lead to a sense of confusion.

(3) Perceived Social Injustice : When a group of people develop a sense of dissatisfaction and discontent towards certain decisions taken by the authority, they feel frustrated and unhappy. Such a feeling can result in a sense of social injustice, eventually culminating into a movement.

(4) Rigidity in the normative structure : To ensure order and discipline, every society lays down a set of norms suitable to its members. Behaviour patterns have to match with the normative structure of society. However in certain cases the norms lose their flexibility and thus do not match with expectations of the masses.

Activity 1

Small group discussion: Form groups of 5-7 students. Identify various forms of social injustice that you have observed in your village/town/locality. Make a list of the same. Find out names of various organisations that work to remove such injustices or which create awareness about the injustices. (For example, the problems faced by specially abled persons, or migrants.)

Social Movements and Social Change

Social movements and social change are interconnected. This implies that every social movement aims to alter the society and thus is instrumental in bringing about change. However, it does not imply that every form of social change is the result of social movements. The two processes though are strongly connected; it is important to distinguish between social movement and social change. Firstly, a social movement has a life cycle - it emerges, operates for the

specified cause and declines. Social change does not follow any such sequence. Secondly, a social movement is an organised, planned activity, however social change is embedded in society; also it may not always be a deliberate and conscious struggle. Thirdly, though social movements are found in all societies, it cannot be said that they are universally present all the time in all societies. Social change is universal and inevitable in society.

5.2

WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN INDIA

In the broad framework of social movements that India has witnessed, experienced and grown with; the Women's Movement continues to hold special significance. In terms of the scope and spread, it spans over a long period and has influenced majority of the population over the globe. The Women's Movement can be studied with the help of the following phases:



Women's movement

(1) Impact of Social Reformers : The roots of the Women's Movement can roughly be traced to the beginning of the 19th century, when small groups of women and a few enlightened (progressive) men addressed the issue of unequal status of women in India. The then Women's movement overlapped with the Social Reform Movement in many ways. **Mahila Mandals** were formed by *Brahmo Samaj* and *Arya Samaj*. These

provided a platform to women, to exchange ideas and grow. Social reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Behramji Malbari challenged the customary practices which were discriminatory. The concerted efforts of reformers resulted in the British government intervening in the matters. The government enacted laws like, The Prevention of Sati Act (1829), The Widow Remarriage Act (1856), The Female Infanticide (Prevention) Act (1870), The Age of Consent at Marriage Act (1891).

Conscious efforts were made to educate women in order to bring them on par with Indian men. The Irish born feminist, Margaret Cousins was instrumental in establishing **Women's Indian Association** in Madras (today Chennai). It can be looked at as an important development because it was almost like India's first feminist group. She organised a conference in Pune in which delegates of different women's groups pooled in their ideas about education for women. This meeting crystallised ideas and inputs about promoting women's education in India. The **All India Women's Conference** was established in the year 1926. The impact of the British on the general aim and philosophy of the Women's movement cannot be denied. Liberalism in thoughts and approach had set in, encouraging women to educate themselves. Though most women beneficiaries belonged to the upper caste with an elite background; the British period did push the women's cause for the welfare of humankind. Women became more aware of their status and position in Indian society.

(2) Impact of Nationalist Movement :

The Nationalist Movement witnessed increased participation of women. The impact of Gandhiji on the thought and participation of women was manifold. Mobilisation of women to fight for political independence implied women becoming aware about their rights. Women participated in large numbers in protests and agitations during the independence

struggle. When men freedom fighters were imprisoned; their women counterparts handled the difficult and challenging circumstances. Women leaders who deserve mention in this context are Kasturba Gandhi, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Annie Beasant and Sarojini Naidu. Annie Besant led the famous Home Rule Movement in which many women participated. Sarojini Naidu worked for Women's Suffrage (right to vote) and led the Congress wing in the Civil Disobedience movement. In addition, Muthulaxmi Reddy, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Sarala Devi, Sucheta Kriplani, Aruna Asaf Ali participated in the Non-violence Movement. The Quit India Resolution passed in the year 1942, addressed women as 'Disciplined Soldiers of Indian Freedom Struggle'.

(3) Post-Independence Era : The Post-Independence period witnessed a slowing down of the Women's Movement because political independence overshadowed its focus and purpose. The Constitution of India incorporated several clauses highlighting equality and justice to the Indian citizens, men and women alike. Several issues like tribal unrest, economic crisis, student's agitation led to collective struggles and protests, thus taking away the singular focus of the women's movement.

The decade 1975-85 was announced as the **International Women's Decade** and the year 1975 was declared as the International Women's Year by the United Nations (U.N.O.). A committee was formed to study the status of women in India. The committee published its report in the year 1974. The report, '**Towards Equality**' addressed issues of invisibility of women, patriarchy and violence against women. The findings of the report proved to be of pivotal importance because it brought to the forefront the discriminatory and exploitative practices against women in post-independent India. It surveyed and reviewed several issues pertaining to the problems of women that

were assumed to be handled by then.

This phase of Women's movement focussed more on violence against women, sex stereotyping, and further legislative demands for equality of women. By the 1980s, women's organisations were active in Bombay (Mumbai), Pune and Delhi. Newsletters like *Baija*, The Feminist Network, *Manushi* were published, to bring women's issues to the forefront. By the end of the International Women's Decade in 1985, the focus of the movement had shifted considerably. Cases that proved decisive in determining the modern course of the Women's Movement are – Mathura Rape case (1972), Roop Kanwar Sati case (1987), Nirbhaya Rape case (2012). Increasing instances of crime against women like dowry deaths, eve teasing, and domestic violence were the reference points for feminists to sharpen the focus of the movement.

Recently, a Dalit feminist movement has also emerged, that addresses issues related specifically to this section.

(4) Towards Women's empowerment :

The movement continues to gather momentum by percolating into the rural and tribal parts of India. It takes variety of forms ranging from women as beneficiaries to women as participants. Women from different professions like journalism, academics, medicines and corporates have enthusiastically joined in the mission of empowering women.

The Women's Movement can said to be the most prolific and pluralist movement. Its evolution and growth cannot be described in a monolithic fashion, using a singular criterion of chronology, ideology or geography. It has gone through several phases. The basic objectives of the movement can be summarised into three important points : (i) struggle for equal rights, (ii) elimination of discriminatory practices, (iii) realisation and actualisation of women's potential to empower themselves. The participants in the movement are: women

activists, enlightened men, voluntary non-governmental organisations and government itself. It continues to operate vehemently with shifting paradigms and perspectives.

You should know!

The **Vishaka Guidelines** refer to the problem of work-place related sexual harassment. These were initially announced by the Supreme Court of India in 1997, and further revised in 2013. Such a legal provision ensures a safe and healthy work environment for women.

Activity 2

Find out about women's groups / NGOs in your locality (e.g. anganwadi women teachers, lesbian women, Dalit women's groups, Muslim women's organisations). Visit their organisation to find out about the work that they do. You may interview the group members or their volunteers, to find out about the nature of their work or outreach programmes, problems they face etc. Present your findings in class. Initiate a discussion.

5.3

WORKERS' MOVEMENT IN INDIA

An appropriate starting point to understand the workers' movement in India would be the process of industrialisation in India. The advent of factory system and modern industry changed several of the important features and patterns in Indian society. It transformed our economy and revised the division of labour with reference to the new production system. There emerged two classes in society namely, the industrialists (factory owners) and the labourers (workers). Since modern industry thrives on profit maximisation, the exploitation of workers in terms of extraction of work, minimisation of

wages, long hours of work, delays in promotion, reduced wages, poor work conditions, became a feature of industrialising societies. Such situations prompted workers to get together to protest against the system in India.

The course of industrial working class movement can broadly be divided into four stages:



Workers' movement

(1) Emergence of the Workers' Movement (1850 to 1918) : The first phase was preliminary and revolved around spontaneous, isolated incidents of protests by groups of workers without prior planning and organisation.

In March, 1875 Shapurji Bengalee revolted against the bad conditions of labour. His efforts resulted in enactment of the First Factories Act in 1881. Another important activist who deserves mention is Narayan Meghaji Lokhande. The first workers' organisation in India the 'Bombay Mill Hands Association' was started on 23rd September 1884 under his guidance. He organised a conference of mill workers in Bombay Presidency to consolidate the demands and problems of workers and passed resolutions to improve the conditions. Narayan Meghaji Lokhande is recognised as the **Father of the Indian Workers Movement**.

The second phase was marked by a conscious understanding of the issues and problems faced by workers. The formation of Trade Unions was an important development

in this stage. Several philanthropists took a conscious note of the dissatisfaction among workers and tried to bring in welfare measures to remedy the situation. According to many scholars, it was more like a movement for workers, than a movement by workers. Moreover the movement was quite moderate in its approach.

(2) Rise of Pressure Groups (1918 to 1947) : After World War I several changes in the economy and industry took place. Costs and profits went up. However, the wages and work conditions for workers did not improve. This resulted in mass discontent and unrest. Strike is a major power weapon in the hands of labour. Several strikes from the period 1918 to 1920 made workers dissatisfaction palpable. There were upsurges from Textile mill workers from Bombay (Mumbai), Ahmedabad, Sholapur, Madras (Chennai), and the woollen mills of Kanpur, the jute mills of Calcutta (Kolkata), the steel company of Jamshedpur, the Railway workers of Bombay (Mumbai) and Jabalpur and the Seafarers of Bombay (Mumbai). Most of these strikes emerged spontaneously and in a general sense, the causal factors were related to wages and remuneration.

The emergence of Trade Unions as a pressure group can be said to be a very important development in the Workers' movement. The industrial environment of mass discontent led to the emergence of a more organised Trade Union Movement in India. In October 1920, a conference of the representatives of 64 Trade Unions was organised. It resulted in the establishment of **All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC)** under the chairmanship of Lala Lajpatrai. In 1926, the government passed the Indian Trade Union Act whereby all registered unions were granted constitutional recognition. The Bombay Textile Labour Union which operated under the leadership of N. M. Joshi, was the first union to get its recognition under the Act in 1926.

The period also witnessed the emergence of the Leftist ideology with a prominent influence of Marxian thought in the Workers' Movement. This culminated into training the working class to mobilise themselves against the capitalist structure with the aim of overthrowing the exploitative system.

The world economic crisis known as the 'Great Depression' adversely affected the Workers' Movement in India. The number of strikes increased and leaders like Muzaffer Ahmed and Shripad Amrut Dange played an important role in intensifying workers struggle. The Trade Unions diversified according to different ideological orientations. In order to bring in coordination, the **National Trade Union Federation (NTUF)** was established. The united efforts of AITUC and NTUF did not bring in much relief; the tension and enmity among different unions continued.

(3) Role of INTUC (1948 to 1960) : In the year 1947, the **Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC)** was formed. In 1948 a separate organisation, independent of political affiliation, to safeguard and promote rights of workers was established. It was known as **Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS)**. Those who did not agree with the principles of HMS consequently established a parallel body called **United Trade Union Congress (UTUC)** in 1949. The **Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS)** was established in the year 1955. When Congress came to power in 1947 the activities of Trade Unions were scrutinised and even criticised. The most important criticism being that the workers' unions and their activities were now monitored by the government itself.

Besides these four major central workers organisations, several other trade unions continued to play an important role in the workers' movement. In the subsequent years strike continued to be used as a mechanism by workers, against industrialists. In the 1960s the grievances among the workers

were pertaining to wages, bonus, overtime which consequently changed to suspension from work, unfair dismissal, and workers' rights. As industry advanced, grievances changed further to include lack of opportunities for promotion, scope to experiment, workers dignity etc. Every established political party developed its own Trade Union wing with the purpose of having an element of control on workers and expanding its vote bank. This consequently implied that the bigger the political party, more powerful was its hold on workers. Similarly, a split in a party resulted in division of unions. For example, when the Communist wing split into CPI and CPM, the Union was taken over by CPI and the latter established a separate body called the **Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU)**.

(4) Consolidation and Diversification of the Movement (after 1960) : Up to the early 1950s, Workers' Movement successfully fought the battle of workers marked with considerable gains with regard to remuneration, work conditions etc. The 1960s witnessed a lull in economic growth and expansion. The managements started resisting demands of the workers due to economic slow down. **The Industrial Disputes Act 1947**, was passed to ensure industrial peace and harmony by providing a mechanism and procedure for the investigation and settlement of industrial disputes. It allowed the usage of mechanisms like conciliation, arbitration and adjudication to mitigate the conflict between workers and management.

Even in adverse conditions, up till 1970s the movement did a promising job of representing the interests and problems of workers.

The Workers' Movement lost its momentum after 1970s. The Textile industry strike which lasted roughly for eight years, proved to be the last strike of its kind. The historical **Great Bombay Textile Strike** started in January, 1982 by the mill workers in Mumbai under the Union leader Datta

Samant. In all 65 Textile Mills, which implied 250,000 workers, stopped working. The main aim of the strike was a demand for hike in wages and bonus related matters. Along with the demand for a wage hike, Datta Samant also demanded scrapping of **The Bombay Industrial Act of 1947**. The then government firmly rejected the demand of the workers' unions. The strike continued for years, resulting in major loss for industry and extreme pauperisation among workers. Many workers had to sell off their subsistent, meagre assets and move to suburban parts of Mumbai. The strike left quite a negative impact on the industrial relations between the labour, industry and the government.

As per the Report of Labour Bureau of the Ministry of Labour, Government of India, 2012, there were approximately 16,154 Trade Unions in India. Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh continues to be the largest Trade Union in India. The movement is largely divided along political lines. Given the current situation in industry, the role of the government is significantly altered. Certain prominent Central Trade Union Organisations recognised by the Ministry of Labour, Government of India are AITUC (All India Trade Union Congress), INTUC (Indian National Trade Union Congress) and SEWA (Self Employed Womens' Association). The trade unions are often affiliated to larger federations. Trade Union Federations like The All Indian Bank Employee Association and Railway Trade Unions continue to operate. One of the prominent federations in the country which represents labour at a national level is the **Central Trade Union Organisation (CTUO)**

The Workers' Movement has come a long way. Certain remarkable changes that deserve mention are: (i) workers' issues for which the movement had fought, (ii) the leadership under which it was shaped. It began with philanthropists working for the betterment of workers, (iii) workers themselves who started fighting for the cause, from here

the union leaders emerged as a category, (iv) the significant role played by the government. With globalisation the role of the government is altered as well, (v) Politicisation of unions.

Activity 3

Form groups of 6 students. Identify a workers' movement in your locality or region. Make a PPT of 12 slides. The content should provide information on how they were established, the significant persons associated with the movement, their major output or successes, the challenges they faced. Make your presentation in class. All group members should discuss a minimum of 2-3 points. The presentation may be followed by a Q&A session.

5.4

FARMERS' MOVEMENT IN INDIA



Farmer's movement

India is predominantly an agricultural country. A majority of the Indian population follow agriculture-related occupations. A range of groups are associated with farming in India, the most predominant of which may be said to be the farmers. Farmers are a geographically scattered category. However instances of the consolidation of their power as a response to unrest and suppression are documented in Indian history. The Farmers' struggle in India is documented with reference to the following important phases:

(1) Early Agitations (1857 to 1921) :

Kathleen Gough has described the British period highlighting the changes that impacted the rural pockets of India. Firstly, the early part of the British rule was marked by exploitative revenue system. The farmers, peasants had to rely on the money-lenders to pay *lagaan* (Taxes) to the British authorities. During this phase the Zamindari system became prevalent through which landlords, could snatch away land from poor farmers when the farmers were unable to pay taxes. Many small cultivators lost their right over their hereditary land and resources. The problem was further compounded by famines and natural calamities during this period. Indebtedness increased and exploitation multiplied. This led to massive discontent among farmers.

Several revolts took place during this period. Several sociologists like A. R. Desai, D. N. Dhanagare have documented the series of struggles by peasants and farmers against the British government. To name a few, the Deccan riots against money lenders, the upsurge by Bengal tenants against Zamindari, the Punjab Kisan struggles against money lenders etc. During 1917-18 two peasant struggles led by the National Congress are important, namely, the **Champaran Struggle** in Bihar against Indigo planters and the **Satyagraha movement** of the peasants in Kaira against collection of land revenue in a situation of crop failure. The Congress formed Peasant Committees to take note of the unrest and demands of peasant grievances.

(2) Emergence of Kisan Sabhas (1922 to 1946) : The initiative by the Congress party to support the interests of landlords and Zamindars triggered a backlash. The Congress supporting the capitalists did not go down well with a section of struggling farmers. In 1926-27 many **Kisan Sabhas** were organised in Bengal, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh with revolutionary plans in mind. The Kisan Sabha movement started in Bihar under the

leadership of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, with the purpose of raising voices against the Zamindari system. The representatives of the Kisan Sabhas from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, presented a memorandum in the All Party Conference, covering the major demands. Two struggles of the peasantry of Bardoli district, Gujarat broke out in succession; the first in 1928-29 and the second in 1930-31.

The movement gathered momentum in the 1930s. In 1935, the first Kisan Congress was held which was successful in putting forth the unrest and agony of farmers. This resulted in the formation of the **All India Kisan Sabha** (AIKS) at the Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress in April 1936. The struggle spread to the other parts of India as well. In Punjab, the farmers' movement erupted under the leadership of Raja Mahendra Pratap. The Ghadar party played a very important role in mobilising farmers and peasants of Punjab together. In Gujarat, Mahatma Gandhi led the struggle of poor farmers against the British government in Kheda. In the Southern belt (e.g. in Andhra Pradesh), the struggle erupted against the Forest Law. This phase is also characterised by worsening of peasant position, consequently culminating into a series of revolts and rebellious actions.

(3) Post-Independence period : Political independence did not translate into improvement of the conditions for peasants and farmers. The emergence of farmers' movement in the Post-Independence era can be located somewhere in the 1970s. Understandably the unrest was felt in the States that were agriculturally, commercially developed States, in their economic orientation. e.g. Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. New ideological perspectives influenced the course of the movement in the Post-Independence era.

In the 1960s and 70s the movement became more organised. Charansingh became a very important name in the farmers'

struggle. He opposed heavy mechanisation and industrialisation; and championed low capital investment in agriculture. He formed the **Bharatiya Kranti Dal** (BKD) and the **Bhartiya Lok Dal** (BLD) in 1974. By the 1970s farmers started forming their groups, without the backing of any political organisation. In 1973 a convention of farmers was held in New Delhi, it was followed by yet another convention in 1978. It presented a 20-point charter of demands to the government. Demands like representation of farmers on decision-making bodies, bridging the imbalance between agriculture and industry etc. were included. During this time Tamil Nadu and Punjab witnessed emergence of strong farmers' organisations. In 1980, the formation of the **Shetkari Sangatana** under the leadership of Sharad Joshi and **Karnataka Rajya Ryot Sangh** under the leadership of M. D. Nanjundaswamy are milestones in the Farmers' movement in India.

With the processes of industrialisation and globalisation, conditions have changed rapidly for farmers. With seasonal fluctuations, apathy of the government and negligence by masses, farmers continue to suffer in India. Abysmal work conditions are drawing farmers to a state of despair. Farmers' suicide has become a common affair. In March 2018, thousands of farmers from different parts of Maharashtra got together to march to Azad Maidan (Mumbai), to convey to the government their grievances and frustrations. For the first time ever, the term 'Farmers' Strike' was used by media personnel, when farmers ignored the market in disgust, throwing agricultural produce on roads. A radically new chapter was added to the farmers movement in India.

Activity 4

Collect newspaper and journal reports on farmer suicides in the past year. Display this information on your class bulletin board.

5.5

ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT IN INDIA

Gadgil and Guha have defined Environmental Movement as, "An organised social activity consciously directed towards promoting sustainable use of natural resource, halting environmental degradation or bringing about environmental restoration." The terms **Green Movement**, **Conservation Movement** are also used alternatively to refer to the Environmental Movement.

Environmentalism is a broad philosophy. It is centred around a genuine concern for the conservation and improvement of the habitat around us, more specifically the environment and civilisation. Several direct and indirect threats to the well being of human life are perceived as an inevitable consequence of modernisation and industrialisation. The erratic demographic, social and cultural inconsistencies in lifestyle are posing serious problems to ecological balance.

(1) Emergence of the Environmental Movement in India : Modern environmentalism began in the 1960s. Increased awareness and mass consciousness about environmental degradation led to the organisation of many activities, programmes and publications. President Richard Nixon signed the US Environmental Policy Act in the year 1970. Since then, 22nd April is celebrated as 'Earth Day' all over the world. In 1972, the **United Nations Conference on Human Environment** held at Stockholm triggered the interest of many environmentalists. The Green Movement in Germany and North America in the early 1980s played a significant role in spreading awareness about the importance of protecting, preserving and harnessing 'Mother Earth'. Consequently the movement spread to other parts of the globe as well.

Indian society like most developing countries is characterised by an almost insensitive and unrestricted exploitation of

resources. The Environmental Movement in India can be said to be unique in its orientation and objectives than other social movements for the following reasons:

- The movement aims at the collective goodness of humankind as against most of the other movements where the target group is specific and defined.

- The scope of the movement is wide and inclusive in the sense it has incorporated within its folds, categories that are marginalised for different reasons, like tribal, farmers and women.

- The movement has utilised non-violent yet assertive means to present its agenda of preservation of environment.

- The movement has constantly compelled authorities to factor in the collective goodness of ecology while making policies and implementing laws.

(2) Causal Issues : Environmental movements have emerged as a reaction to several threats to ecological balance. The causes are interconnected and inevitable. Rapid environmental degradation due to industrialisation, urbanisation and excessive use of technology is a prime cause of concern. Rapid population growth has led to indiscriminate use of natural resources. Major issues pertaining to land, water and biodiversity are adversely affecting the ecological balance of society. Problems like deforestation, air pollution, marine and coastal problems, soil pollution have become common manifestations of ecological imbalance.

Scholars insist that the environmental movement in India is the product of the conflict between different ideological views. The theme of the interface between humans and nature is central to the movement. Gandhiji's idea of Gram Swarajya is based on rationalism and self-sufficiency rooted in the indigenous soil with the aim of harnessing and sustaining our own sources, as against the model of Radical Marxism with a heavy

reliance on modern science and technology, and viewing environmental degradation as rooted in the inequalities in society. Thus, the causes of the environmental movement are more than mere ecological; these are more economic and social.

(3) Significant Environmental Movements in India : The environmental movement does not have a monolithic profile. It has a broad scope. It encompasses issues related to ecology, health, human rights, tribal rights, eco-feminism etc. To appreciate the broad spectrum of the movement it is important to note that the movement is more like a series of independent but constituent revolts, insurgencies and rebellion. Harsh Sethi has presented five prominent categories of struggles associated with environmentalism, namely, (i) forest and forest resources, (ii) land use, (iii) water, (iv) anti-dam and (v) against different types of pollution and marine resources. Some significant environmental movements are mentioned below:



Chipko movement

Chipko Movement : It was started by **Amrita Devi**. It is a unique movement. From

its very inception and throughout the course; it is marked by the Gandhian principle of non-violence and is known for the active participation of women in it. Chipko stands for 'hug-the-tree'. The movement was started in March 1973, in Chamoli district in the Himalayan region under the leadership of **Sunderlal Bahuguna**. Most of the Chamoli district is covered by forests. The livelihood of inhabitants residing there is closely linked to the forests. The subsistence economy was primarily based on agriculture and forests produce. With the predominance of agrarian, food-gathering and pastoral economy, there was heavy reliance on forests produce.

However, demographic and economic factors led to indiscriminate use of forests and led to deforestation. Processes of industrialisation and development led to improvement in the means of transport and communication. People involved in developmental projects challenged the established claim of local people on forests. Loss of means of livelihood affected and angered people leading to the emergence of the movement. In April 1973, when the contractors along with the workers reached Mandal village to cut trees and to clear jungles spaces allotted to them by the State government, the inhabitants hugged the trees, to resist and to mark their protest. The action happened at a mass level, as a result of which the authorities had to retreat. The women of the village also participated in the protest. This incident boosted the morale of several other groups facing similar problems to get together and to protest against deforestation.

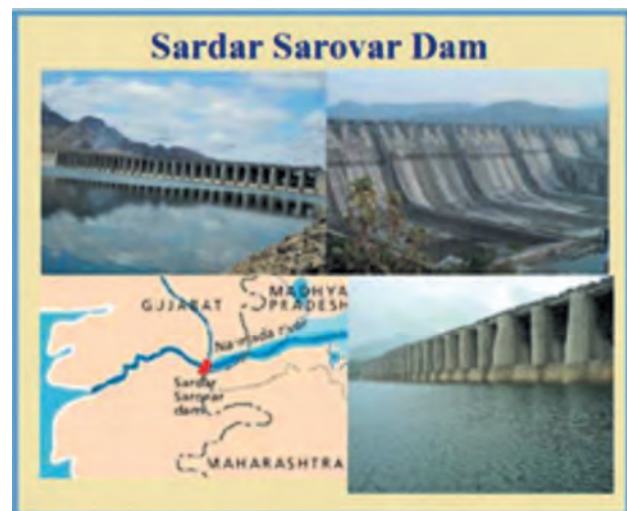


Environmentalist - Sunderlal Bahuguna

Narmada Bachao Andolan : Jawaharlal Nehru referred to dams as 'Temples of Modern India'. In the post-Independence period several large scale dam projects were sanctioned. Though the purpose of building dams can never be contested, the inevitable impact of building dams in most cases is displacement. Displacement leads to loss of livelihood for tribals and local people.



Medha Patkar and demonstrators



Sardar Sarovar Dam

Narmada is the largest West-flowing river supporting the habitat, which includes tribal and rural pockets also. The construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the river Narmada would have benefited three States, namely, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. This most promising multi-crore project would have generated huge revenue for the government. The supporters claimed that it would have been a source of power (electricity) and drinking water to the neighbouring settlement, villages and towns.

The need to mobilise and protest against such a venture was perceived when the building of a dam implied taking away the livelihood of local inhabitants and displacing them. In 1985, the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) emerged as one of the powerful resistance movements under the leadership of **Medha Patkar**. It became an international movement and thousands of activists from India and abroad joined hands against the construction of this dam. In October 1994, Medha Patkar went on an indefinite dharna to pressurise the three State governments. The movement suggested the use of alternative methods for generation of electricity and adequate rehabilitation of the displaced.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan has brought issues of sustainable development to the forefront. It has questioned the validity of policy decisions about development and the utility of the same.

The environmental movement continues to gather new dimensions as a modernising society revises its demands and requirements to ensure the wellbeing of all people.

In this Unit we have learned about the difference between social change and social movement. Social movements lead to social changes. The focus has been on the women's movement, farmers' movements, workers' movements and environmental movements. All these movements continue to be relevant even in the present times.

Activity 5

- (A) Have you heard of Greta Thunberg? Discuss the effect of her activism.
- (B) View the film 'Lakir ke is Taraf' by Shilpa Ballal. Then have a class discussion.

SUMMARY

- This unit explains the meaning of social movement as an effort of human beings to bring about or resist change.
- There are different types of social movements – reformatory, revolutionary, expressive, general, alternative social movements.
- The characteristics of all social movements are – they are collective efforts, planned and deliberate, driven by an ideology and objectives, and they bring about social change. Social movements lead to social change but all social changes are not necessarily social movements.
- Different kinds of movements include: Women's Movement, Workers' Movements, Farmers' Movements and Environmental Movements.
- The Women's Movement started in the British period with social reforms, bringing about changes for women. In the post-Independence phase several women's issues for their empowerment have come to the fore.
- The Workers' Movement focuses on their rights, in an industrialising society. It sees the emergence of trade unions with varying affiliation, under significant leaders.
- The Farmers' Movement focuses on the lives of farmers, their livelihoods, land rights and farmers' issues.
- The Environmental Movement has concentrated on the various issues affecting the environment – from protecting our forests, water resources, impact of climate change and global warming, sustainable development issues and the like.

EXERCISES

Q.1 (A) Complete the following statements by choosing the correct alternative given in the bracket and rewrite it.

- (1) The Chipko Movement is for ____.
(women's empowerment, labour rights, saving the environment)
- (2) The Bhartiya Lok Dal was started in the year ____.
(1954, 1964, 1974)

(B) Correct the incorrect pair and rewrite it.

- (1) (i) Women's Movement – Gender equality
(ii) International Decade of Women – From 1991-2001
(iii) Towards Equality – Report on the Status of Women in India
(iv) Feminist Movements – India after Independence

(C) Identify the appropriate term from the given option in the box and rewrite it against the given statement.

S. A. Dange, Sarala Devi, Medha Patkar

- (1) Leader of Narmada Bachao Andolan
- (2) Significant role in the Trade Union Movement

(D) Correct underlined words and complete the statement.

- (1) The first Kisan Congress held in 1935 led to the establishment of the United Trade Union Congress.
- (2) The Women's Indian Association was formed in Bombay.

Q.2 Write short notes.

- (1) Farmers' Movement
- (2) Characteristics of social movement

Q.3 Write differences.

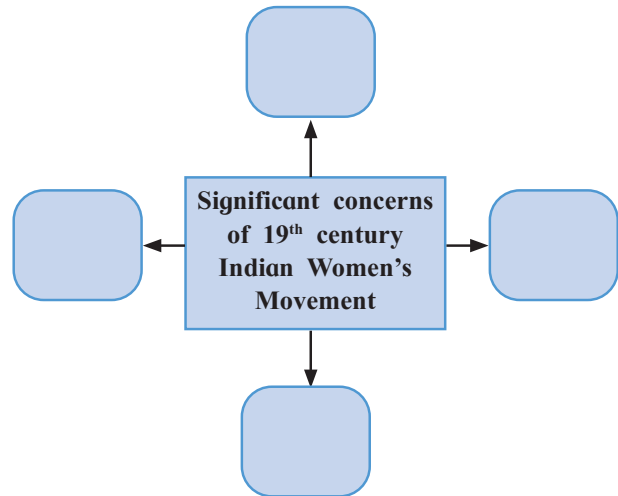
- (1) Pre-Independence and Post-Independence periods of the Women's Movement in India

Q.4 Explain the following concepts with examples.

- (1) Social Movement

- (2) Environmental Movement

Q.5 Complete the concept map.



Q.6 Give your personal response.

- (1) Has the study of Environmental Education had any effect on your behaviour?
- (2) Why is it important to raise social concerns through social movements?

Q.7 Answer the following question in detail. (About 150-200 words)

'Social movements play an important role in bringing about changes in society.' With reference to this statement, choose any two different social movements that you have studied and comment on:

- (i) the issues related to the movement, and
- (ii) how the movement has brought about changes in Indian society.

ACTIVITY

- Identify any 5 conservation/environmental initiatives (e.g. Go Green, Save the Forests, Save Aarey, Eco-friendly Ganapati)
- Make group presentations in class about their aims, objectives and activities.
- This may be followed by a class discussion or home assignment.