

UNIT 6

ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

Public Discourse and Public Opinion:

Public discourse and public opinion are closely related concepts that play a key role in civic and community engagement. Let's define them and understand their connection in easy English.

1. Public Discourse:

Public discourse is the open conversation or debate that takes place among people about important issues that affect society. This can happen in different places, like newspapers, social media, community meetings, or on TV. It's where people share their thoughts, ideas, and opinions about topics that are important to them, like politics, laws, or community problems.

In Civic Engagement: Public discourse allows citizens to discuss issues like voting rights, environmental problems, education, healthcare, and community safety. When people talk and debate these issues, they get a better understanding of different perspectives and can come up with solutions to make their communities better. Imagine a neighborhood where there's a lot of garbage and pollution. People might use public discourse on platforms like Facebook, local newspapers, or in town hall meetings to discuss what can be done. Some may argue for stricter waste management policies, while others might suggest organizing a community cleanup event.

2. Public Opinion:

Public opinion is what most people in a society think about a particular issue or topic. It reflects the general attitudes and beliefs that the majority of the public holds after hearing different sides of an argument or topic through public discourse.

In Civic Engagement: Public opinion shapes the decisions made by leaders and governments. If a large number of people agree on a certain issue, like better healthcare or improving education, the government or local leaders are more likely to take action. Public opinion influences policies and laws that affect society. If the public discourse about garbage and pollution in a neighborhood leads most people to agree that more needs to be done to clean the area, this public opinion can push the local government to create stricter waste management rules or increase funding for cleanup programs.

How They Are Connected?

1. **Public Discourse Leads to Public Opinion:** When people discuss and debate issues openly (public discourse), their ideas and perspectives shape how the general population feels about those issues. This creates a common understanding or agreement, known as public opinion.

2. **Influence on Civic and Community Engagement:** Both public discourse and public opinion are essential for civic and community engagement. They provide the foundation for people to participate in decision-making processes, vote on issues, or take action to improve their communities. Public discourse helps educate citizens, and public opinion guides actions and policies.

Real-life Example in Pakistan:

- a. **Education Reform: Public Discourse:** In recent years, many people in Pakistan have used social media, news channels, and public forums to talk about the state of the education system. These discussions have included ideas about how to improve the quality of education, ensure girls' education, and provide more resources for teachers.
- b. **Public Opinion:** After many discussions, a large portion of the public has developed a strong opinion that the government should invest more in education and improve access for everyone. This public opinion has led to pressure on the government to increase the education budget and create new policies to improve schools.
- c. **Civic Engagement:** Due to this strong public opinion, people have started engaging more actively by voting for leaders who promise education reform, attending protests for better school funding, or even volunteering in their communities to help educate children.

Role of Advocacy in Addressing Social Issues:

Advocacy means speaking up or taking action to support a cause or bring attention to a problem. It helps people who face social issues, such as poverty, education inequality, gender discrimination, or healthcare challenges, to make their voices heard and push for change.

Advocacy can involve individuals, groups, or organizations working to influence the government, businesses, or the general public to make improvements that benefit society. In Pakistan, advocacy has played a major role in solving various social issues.

1. **Raising Awareness:** Advocacy helps spread knowledge and understanding about a social issue. This is important because many people may not be aware of certain

transparency, and calling for improvements where they fall short. Example from Pakistan: Advocacy for Transparency in Government Projects. Many civil society groups in Pakistan, such as the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT), advocate for transparency and accountability in government projects. They monitor government spending, election processes, and policy implementation to ensure that officials are delivering on their promises and acting in the public's best interest.

6. Providing Support and Resources: Advocacy organizations often provide direct help to people who are affected by social issues. This can include giving people legal assistance, providing education or healthcare, or helping them access government services. Example from Pakistan: Shirkat Gah's support for women's rights. Shirkat Gah, a women's rights organization, advocates for women's empowerment and provides legal aid, health services, and education to women facing violence or discrimination. Through their **advocacy work**, they help women navigate the legal system and improve their quality of life.

Social Action Movements:

Social action movements are organized efforts by groups of people who come together to fight for **social change** or address an issue in **society**. These movements are often driven by a **common goal**, like improving education, fighting discrimination, or protecting the environment. People in social action movements may protest, hold rallies, **spread awareness**, or work with the government to achieve their objectives.

The goal of social action movements is to create positive changes in society, particularly for groups of people who may be facing problems like inequality, injustice, or poverty.

Key Features of Social Action Movements:

- 1. Collective Effort:** Social action movements involve a group of people working together, not just individuals. They unite to amplify their voices and create bigger impacts.
- 2. Clear Purpose:** These movements have a specific goal or issue they want to address, such as fighting for women's rights, improving healthcare, or stopping climate change.
- 3. Public Participation:** Social movements encourage ordinary citizens to participate, whether by protesting, raising awareness, or pressuring the government for policy changes.

4. Long-Term Impact: Social action movements usually aim for lasting change. While protests or events may be short-term, the goal is to bring about changes in laws, policies, or social attitudes that last.

Types of Social Action Movements:

- 1. Reform Movements:** These movements work to improve specific parts of society without changing the entire system. They focus on fixing problems, such as unfair laws or social practices. The Civil Rights Movement in the USA worked to give equal rights to African Americans without changing the government structure.
- 2. Revolutionary Movements:** These movements seek to completely change or replace the existing system, like the government or social order. They want a new system to take over. The French Revolution (1789) aimed to overthrow the monarchy and set up a republic in France.
- 3. Resistance Movements:** These movements fight against changes they don't agree with or that they think will harm society. They try to stop reforms or prevent new policies. The Tea Party Movement in the USA opposed government spending and higher taxes.
- 4. Religious Movements:** These movements aim to reform, spread, or protect religious beliefs and practices. They may want to revive traditional values or adapt religion to modern times. The Protestant Reformation in the 16th century sought to reform the practices of the Catholic Church.
- 5. Environmental Movements:** These movements focus on protecting the environment and addressing issues like pollution, climate change, and natural resource conservation. The Green Movement promotes renewable energy and actions to stop global warming.
- 6. Labor Movements:** These movements work to improve conditions for workers, like better pay, safer working environments, and job security. The Trade Union Movement fought for workers' rights, such as shorter working hours and better wages.
- 7. Identity Movements:** These movements fight for the rights and recognition of specific identity groups, such as race, gender, or sexual orientation. They aim to end discrimination and promote equality. The LGBTQ+ Rights Movement advocates for the rights and acceptance of people regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Pakistani Examples of Social Action Movements:

1. Edhi Foundation – Social Welfare Movement:

Purpose: While not a protest movement, the Edhi Foundation, led by Abdul Sattar

Edhi, is an example of a social action movement focused on helping the poor, orphans, and marginalized people in Pakistan.

Actions: The foundation provides free healthcare, ambulance services, shelters, orphanages, and support for the homeless and poor across Pakistan.

Impact: The Edhi Foundation has become one of the largest and most respected charitable organizations in Pakistan, helping millions of people access basic necessities like food, healthcare, and shelter.

2. Climate Change Movement (Climate Action Pakistan):

Purpose: This movement aims to address environmental issues like pollution, deforestation, and climate change, which are affecting Pakistan's environment and people.

Actions: Climate activists hold protests, awareness campaigns, and tree-planting drives to push the government and public to take climate change seriously. They demand stronger environmental policies and actions to combat pollution and protect natural resources.

Impact: The climate change movement has helped raise awareness about environmental degradation and the need for sustainable practices. It has also pushed for more government action, such as clean energy initiatives.

3. Khudai Khidmatgar Movement (Servants of God Movement):

Background: The Khudai Khidmatgar Movement was started by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (also known as Bacha Khan) in the 1920s. Although this is a historical movement, it holds immense significance in shaping social activism in the region that is now Pakistan. It was a non-violent movement advocating for the rights of the Pashtun people and resisting British colonial rule.

Goals: The movement aimed to promote education, social reforms, and the rights of the Pashtun people. It was also aligned with the Indian independence struggle, emphasizing the power of non-violent resistance.

Actions: Members of the movement wore red shirts as a symbol of their commitment and engaged in peaceful protests, social service, and advocacy for education. They promoted non-violence and unity among the Pashtuns.

Impact: The movement had a significant impact on promoting social reforms in the Pashtun regions, emphasizing education and social justice. Bacha Khan's legacy of non-violence continues to inspire activists in Pakistan, especially in the context of minority rights and social activism.

4. Kashmir Solidarity Movement:

Background: The Kashmir Solidarity Movement is a long-standing movement in

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Pakistan, supporting the rights of the Kashmiri people in their struggle for self-determination. It is linked to the broader dispute between Pakistan and India over the region of Kashmir.

Goals: The movement advocates for the right of Kashmiris to determine their own political future through a plebiscite, as outlined in United Nations resolutions. It seeks to raise awareness of the human rights violations in Indian-administered Kashmir.

Actions: Every year on February 5th, Pakistan observes Kashmir Solidarity Day, where people organize protests, rallies, and events to show support for the Kashmiri cause. Advocacy for Kashmir's right to self-determination is also a common theme in political speeches, academic forums, and media campaigns.

Impact: The movement has kept the Kashmir issue alive in both national and international forums. It has garnered global attention and continues to influence Pakistan's foreign policy toward India and Kashmir.

