

## ROLE OF SOCIO-POLITICAL MOVEMENTS

### 19.1 INTRODUCTION

In the lessons in Module 2 of your course, you have learnt that both during the national movement and at the time of framing of Constitution, democracy was not considered merely a system of holding elections. The national leaders did not see introduction of political independence as an end in itself. It was seen as a means to liberate people from not only political oppression but also from social and economic exploitation. This needed initiative on the part of the state and participation by the people. The democratic institutional arrangements also provide scope for the expression of popular demands.

Many a times the initiatives taken by the state for developmental or welfare tasks are not considered adequate. Some times sections of people feel that state is favouring only a few. It is not formulating or implementing policies for their benefits. At times people also find the institutional arrangements like Parliament, or elections insufficient to express their aspirations or redress their complaints. These feelings of dissatisfactions give birth to social and political movements of protest. In India there have emerged a number of such movements. Particularly since 1970s these have come to prominence. They are now playing an important role in the politics of the country. They mobilise and organise people for action and participation.

In this lesson you will learn about these movements, their origin, growth, nature and the role they are playing in our political and developmental processes.

### 19.2 OBJECTIVES

This lesson deals with the evolution, nature and role of socio-political movements. After reading this lesson you will be able to:

- describe the meaning and characteristics of social and political movements;
- explain types of social and political movements that have emerged in various parts of the country and in many areas;
- identify some important movements that have emerged in India;
- describe and evaluate movements concerning some broader and general issues like human rights, environment and women;

- explain and assess the role and importance of social and political movements in Indian democracy.

### 19.3 MEANING AND CHARACTERISTICS

General meaning of social and political movements is a collective attempt to bring about change or resist change. The attempt may be either to bring about change in some existing order or programme or to create a new order. Some writers define social movement as an effort by a large number of people to solve collectively a problem they feel they share in common. A collective action is not a movement only because a large number of people are involved. Collective action is called a movement when it is organised and sustained.

From the above we can bring out some important characteristics of social movements.

1. The social movement involves a collective action. It is not an action by an individual or a small group of people.
2. The collective action is aimed at bringing a change or resisting a change. It means it is meant to influence policy decision or to stop some action.
3. The action is organised. There is some kind of leadership to guide and plan. There is some programme of action.
4. The action is sustained. That is movement continues till the achievement of goal or at least for considerable period of time in the hope of success.

Here it may be mentioned that social movements are different from pressure groups or institutional movements. Institutional movements are primarily interest or occupation based movements and are highly organised. These are also to a great extent permanent in nature. For example trade union movement or cooperative movement cannot be called social movements. Social movements, in a way emerge spontaneously with regard to certain specific issues.

### 19.4 TYPES OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

As social movements generally emerge spontaneously and are organised by the leaders with some specific purposes all these movements are different in terms of their purposes, strategies, organisations and means adopted. On the basis of these we can classify the movements in certain broad types. These can be

- (i) Reform movements
- (ii) Democratic Political movements
- (iii) Revolutionary movements
- (iv) Resistance movements, and
- (ii) Reactionary movements

#### 1. Reform movements

The reform movements are those movements which are directed to bring some changes in the social order. Purpose is not to completely re-structure or reject the order. During colonial period many such movements emerged in India. For example, movements against untouchability, for reform in personal laws, against child marriage, for abolition of sati practice, etc. may be called as reform movements. Reform movements generally are peaceful in nature. They look towards the government for help. They attempt to create

awareness through education, press and persuasion. A democratic system is generally helpful for organisation and success of such movements.

## 2. Democratic Political Movements

You have already learnt that it is the age of democracy. People all over the world had been fighting for their rights, freedom, equality and participation in decision making. Establishment of a democratic system does not mean that all democratic institutions work satisfactorily all the time. There are sometimes, violation of some democratic values or infringement in people's democratic rights by the authorities. Therefore, there emerge from time to time movements for restorations of democratic values and processes, reforms in institutions, protection of democratic rights, etc. Movements for holding elections in time, electoral reforms, against violation of Human Rights, etc. are some of the examples of such political movements.

**Electoral Reforms:** Changes or corrections in election systems. For example, reducing the age for voters from 21 to 18 years, increasing or decreasing expenditure limits, demand for representation in accordance with the percentage of votes polled by parties.

## 3. Revolutionary Movements

There are certain movements which are aimed at completely reconstructing the social order. For this they seek to overthrow the existing system. Such movements generally resort to violent and extra constitutional methods. These are normally not allowed or tolerated by the state. Therefore, these work through underground organisations. Naxalite movement in some parts of the country particularly in 1970s is an example of revolutionary movements. Presently People's War Group in Andhra Pradesh and Maoist Movement in Bihar are important revolutionary movements.

## 4. Resistance Movements

Some times state actions or developmental processes effect the lives of certain sections of people. Or, these are not considered according to generally accepted norms of society. In such cases people may organise to resist such change or stop programmes. For example, opposition to construction of big dams by people who are removed from the effected areas, or movement against cutting of trees or against vulgarity and violence in media can be called resistance movements.

**Media :** Media includes various means of public communication such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television, cinema, etc.

## 5. Reactionary Movements

Reactionary movements are also a kind of resistance movements. These are against the reforms or changes introduced by the state or emerging from social actions. These movements aim at pressing the government for restoration of old values as also influencing the society not to accept reforms. Various religious fundamentalist movements can be classified as reactionary. Such movements can use both lawful and unlawful means as their strategies.

## 19.5 EMERGENCE OF MOVEMENTS

You have read above the types of movements. Within these types in a society there can emerge various general or specific movements at different times. However, almost all social

movements arise from one or other form of social unrest caused by dissatisfaction in a significant section of population. Some of these may be for wider and long-term changes like women's status, Human Rights or Environment. Some may be concerned with a specific problem at a specific time like Bonded labour, pollution of a river or demand for creation of new state.

### **INTEXT QUESTIONS 19.1**

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1. Which of the following is not a social movement?
    - a. Workers movement for increase in salaries.
    - b. Movement for abolition of untouchability.
    - c. Movement against encroachment of public land.
    - d. Movement for state funding of elections.
  2. Which of the following is Reactionary Movement?
    - a. Women's movement for equal rights.
    - b. Movement for entry of untouchables into temples.
    - c. Movement for glorification of Sati.
    - d. Movement for adult education.
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### **19.6 MOVEMENTS: ORIGIN AND NATURE**

In a country like India which is full of diversities, inequalities, and is in a process of development and transformation there are various points and issues of conflicts, dissatisfaction and disputes. Political consciousness in India is historical. The nationalist movement in India during British colonial period was such an important movement. There were also various social reform movements. After independence even in the democratic process some times state functionaries or power hungry leaders try to violate democratic norms or rights. Also there emerge among various sections of the people a sense of deprivation due to outcomes of some economic and social policies. Likewise various developmental programmes many a times effect the livelihood or lifestyle of people of the effected areas or regions.

The Constitution of India gives its citizens rights to form association, to amemble and to express their views. In democratic set up, various political parties and non-party organisations also keep on mobilising people on various issues. Growth of education and active role of press also has been making people conscious of their rights, violation of norms by state and other functionaries and importance of collective action.

As a result of all these processes and developments there have been started emergence of movements at various levels and of various kinds. Some of these movements are of general nature and of all India level. For example movements against bonded labour, against child labour, for gender equality spread in most parts of the country. Movements against construction of dams like, Narmada river, or against cutting of trees like on chipko movement are of specific types primarily organised at local level but having all India effects. Movements for creation of new states like Utrakhand, Jharkhand, Gorkha land, etc. are purely of regional nature concerning people of a state or region. Since 1970s a number of movements of general and specific nature, concerning a particular section of people against violation of rights, ending of exploitation, resisting some developmental programmes, for social reforms, etc. have been coming up. To make you understand their importance we are describing below some movements of general nature.

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## 19.7 HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENTS

Constitution of India gives to all its citizens certain fundamental rights. About these you have read in lesson No.6. In addition there are also certain norms accepted by the International community for a dignified and humane living. These concern, assurance of life, acceptance of equality, provision of certain minimum life conditions, non-discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, religion, language, etc. All these various rights are known as human rights. However, many a times various state authorities in exercise of their power either don't respect these rights or violate them on various grounds. For example, people are arrested or detained arbitrarily. Children are engaged in hazardous jobs or not given the opportunity for education. As a result of growing awareness among people there has been growing protests against these violations. Slowly these have attained organised form of a wider Human Rights Movement.

### 1. Origin of Human Rights Movement

Human rights movement in India was started during colonial period. At that time reacting to denial of freedoms by the British administration, some activists organised Human Rights organisations. One of the most active leaders of Human Rights movement then was Jawaharlal Nehru.

In independent India, the Human Rights movement became significant and representations, holding demonstrations, and filing cases in the courts.

### 2. Importance of Human Rights Movement

The human rights movement in India has become very significant in a short time. It has been able to influence all the three organs of government viz. Executive, Legislature and Judiciary. You have read about Public Interest Litigation in lesson No.16. This was an outcome of the efforts of Human Rights organisations. Parliament has been forced not to enact certain laws to restrict the freedoms of people. On the other hand Parliament has enacted laws for protection of different sections of the society in view of the demands made by Human Rights organisation. Recognition of rights of handicapped, prohibition of child labour and bonded labour, provision of free legal aid to poor etc. are some of the examples of such acts. Similarly executive has been forced not to act in certain ways and to act in other ways. For instance now government pays compensation to victims of violence or accidents, etc.

In 1993 the Government of India appointed a National Human Rights Commission as an independent body for spreading human rights awareness and investigating the complaints of rights violations. Appointment of such a Commission can be considered an important achievement of Human Rights movement. Another achievement of Human Rights Movement is inclusion of Human Rights education in school curriculums. As such Human Rights movement is playing an important role in India's social and political life. It has increased the scope of rights beyond fundamental rights given in the Constitution, aroused people's consciousness and put effective checks on the powers of police and other authorities.

## INTEXT QUESTIONS 19.2

1. Which of the following can be called Human Rights movement?
  - a. Agitation for more salaries by government employees.
  - b. Agitation for payment of compensation of Bhopal Gas leakage victims.

- c. Agitation by students not to take examinations.
  - d. Agitation by farmers for cheap electricity.
2. Which of the following will be considered a violation of Human Rights.
- a. Denial of leave to employee to attend friend's marriage.
  - b. Denial of admission to child in school by government.
  - c. Increase in bus-pass charges for students.
  - d. Not providing free electricity to poor people.
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## 19.8 ENVIRONMENT MOVEMENT

As Human Rights are necessary for a dignified human living a clean environment is essential for healthy and satisfactory life. The environment includes rivers, lakes, seas, atmosphere, forests, plants, deserts, hills, plains, etc. Modern day industrialisation, fast growth of cities, growth in population and present generations desires to live a very comfortable and luxurious life are causing over-utilisation of some of the natural resources on the one hand and pollut on of water and atmosphere on the other.

The recent years have witnessed is an emerging consciousness and concern for environmental degradation and pollution and their ill effects. To spread this consciousness and to protect the environment there has been an emergence of voluntary organisations and agitations for this. These organisations work to check the spread of pollution and restore the environmental balance and conserve natural resources. For example there are movements to save the trees from being cut, as well as for planting trees.

You might have heard the names of persons like Sunder Lal Bahuguna and Ms. Megha Patkar. They are associated with popular movements called Chipko and Narmada Bachao. Chipko is a movement to save the trees. People come forward physically to protect a tree if there is an attempt to cut it. Narmada Bachao Andolan is against construction of big dams, because these are considered to be depriving people of their land as also changing the environmental balance.

Like Human Rights Movement the Environment Movement also educates the people, put pressure on government agencies and initiates legal actions against polluters. The movement is also concerned with the protection of interests of people whose livelihood is effected due to environmental changes. For example poor people depending on forests for their needs like firewood suffer because of large scale cutting of trees by timber merchants.

The environmental movement has been quite successful in creating a popular consciousness among people about ill effects of air or water pollution, deforestation, noise, Deforestation: Change of land under forest to other uses after cutting of trees, etc. Government has been pressurised to enact laws for protection of environment like banning the cutting of trees, establishment of factories in residential areas, fixation of maximum amount of smoke emitting from vehicles etc. Recently, Delhi Government has banned smoking in public places. Govt. has also been made to take positive actions like cleaning the rivers, constructing parks, making provisions for garbage disposal, etc.

Various voluntary groups are working at different levels to involve people in undertaking actions by themselves. Do you know any such group in your neighbourhood? If so meet them and find out what they do not think.

## 19.9 WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

In India for centuries women have been treated as inferior. They have been exploited and denied basic rights. During nationalist movement some social reformers took up the cause of women. Political leaders also mobilised women and encouraged them to participate in freedom struggle. Thus women started participating in social and political activities as also started thinking of their own conditions. In 1927 was organised the All India Women's Conference. It was concerned both with social welfare of the women as also their participation in national movement.

After independence though the Constitution of India gave equal rights to men and women in society, much change did not occur. In some respects alongwith development, women have started facing new problems. Dowry deaths, violence and discrimination against women, killing of girl child at birth etc. polygamy in some sections of society is continuing.

**Polygamy** : When a person marries two or more women it is called Polygamy. All the wives live with the husband.

There had now been arising consciousness among women all over the world which made women conscious for their welfare, equality and rights. The new groups in particular protested against injustice. These have taken up a wide range of issues like rape, wife beating, dowry, violence in the family, the problems of working women, trafficking in women, discrimination against women in the name of religious reforms in personal laws, women's health, etc. Some of the women's groups are actively associated with environmental issues.

To strengthen the struggle and mobilise public opinion on women's issues, these groups publish leaflets, conduct signature campaigns, write articles and letters to editors in newspapers. Street plays, skills, songs and posters are also used extensively.

During the last two decades the women's movement in India has become quite strong. It has become a part of international women's movement. It has been able to secure some very important rights for women like equal pay for equal work, share in ancestor property, etc. Women have also become conscious of education and economic independence.

The most important achievement of the women's movement has been a move towards empowerment of women through share in political power and decision-making. One-third seats for women have already been reserved in Panchayats and Municipal bodies. The proposal for reservation of seats in Parliament and State Legislatures is also likely to be approved.

There is no doubt that in India, still a large number of problems relating to women continue to be of serious dimension. to our social system and wrong belief particularly in some sections of society. For this women's movements have to work hard both independently and in association with other movements engaged in social reform and change.

### INTEXT QUESTIONS 19.3

Fill in the blanks with correct statement.

1. Killing a women for insufficient dowry is an issue related to (a family affair, discrimination against women, a crime).
2. Women's movements in general are concerned with \_\_\_\_\_ (more jobs for women, abolition of Pardah system, dignity and equality of women).
3. A movement against pollution of a river will be considered \_\_\_\_\_ (concerning

residents living on the banks of river, for protection of society in general, for tourist attraction).

4. Environmental movements are movements of \_\_\_\_\_  
(rural people, urban people, of all sections of society).
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### 19.10 ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

You have read above that social movements have become very important. Through these movements there has been growing concern about rights, social justice and environmental issues. Peasants, farmers and tribal movements, are engaged in mobilising the people for changes in social and political structures, policies and norms. In that they are performing three important functions:

- i) The social movements help to relate the individual to the larger society. They make individuals aware of social concerns. These movements also give each person a chance to participate and to play a role in the process of social change.
- ii) Social movements communicate to the government the people's concerns, expectations and needs, both in general and specific terms. In this they also put pressure on government to formulate and implement policies in accordance with social needs and aspirations.
- iii) Social movements perform very important function of educating and mobilising the people. They bring to the notice of people important issues, meaning and effects of policies and developmental plans. They also generate new ideas and alternate models of development. As a result people become conscious and able to evaluate the performance of government and political parties.

The social movements in India are performing all the three above mentioned functions in a significant way. As a result they are playing a major part in social change. They are bringing about awareness and consciousness in society and through that significant social and political reforms. They are also influencing the policy formulation process at various levels. They have enlarged the scope of rights, created an environment for bringing justice to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women.

As a result of social movements the courts have made government responsible for maintaining democratic norms, like holding elections in time, creating an environment in which poor and suppressed can vote freely, media is allowed to function independently. Likewise many social welfare programmes are initiated by the government because of pressures from peoples' movements. Thus social and political movement in India have become an important part of the political process. It is now clear that these movements have a significant role in the successful working of democracy.

### WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

During last 50 years of working of democracy people in India have become quite conscious of their rights and status. They have attained the capability to evaluate and assess the governments performance, policies and plans. Apart from participating in elections, people have also started acting to pressurise the government for protection of their rights and interests through organised collective action. This organised collective action attempting to bring a change or resist a change is known as social movements.

The movements are for various purposes and of various types. Some are aimed at bringing social and political reforms while others are reactionary in nature. Some movements adopt peaceful and constitutional means while some become militant or even violent.

The social and political movements are of both general social interests or those of specific class, region or sectional interest. Human Rights, Environment, Women's, Electoral Reforms and anti-communal movements are examples of general social interest and concern. Farmers, peasants and workers movements are examples of class interest. Movements for creation of new States, allocation of resources like water to a particular region, opposition to specific projects in specific areas like dams are examples of movements of regional interest.

The social movements are playing an important role in creating awareness among people, mobilising them for collective action and pressurising the state for bringing changes. These have become an indispensable part of the democratic process. They have become an important mean for protection of rights, democratic norms and attainment of social justice. Through these movements various neglected and deprived sections are finding a voice. These movements, therefore, give necessary strength to democracy.

### TERMINAL EXERCISES

1. Describe the characteristics of social and political movements.
2. Explain briefly the origin and nature of social and political movements in India.
3. What is the importance of human rights movements?
4. Describe the environment movements in India.
5. Explain women's movements in India

## **ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS**

### **19.1**

1. (d)
2. (c)

### **19.2**

1. (b)
2. (b)

### **19.3**

1. a crime
2. dignity and equality of women
3. concerning residents living on the banks of the river
4. of all sections of society

## **HINTS FOR TERMINAL EXERCISES**

1. Please refer to section 19.3
2. Please refer to section 19.6
3. Please refer to section 19.7.2
4. Please refer to section 19.8
5. Please refer to section 19.9