Module 6 Social Protests and Social Movements

Lecture 32
Social Movements in India – Part I

Aberle (1966) described four types of social movements based upon two characteristics:

(a) Who is the movement attempting to change?
(b) How much change is being advocated?

Social movements can be aimed at change on an individual level (e.g., AA) or change on a broader, group or even societal level (e.g., anti-globalization). Social movements can also advocate for minor changes or radical changes.

![Social Movements Diagram]

**Source:** Aberle (1966)
Social Movements in India

The term new social movement refers to those movements which have come up since mid-1960s. The new social movements look into various collective actions, their identity and on their relations for culture ideology and politics. These differ in from the old that, (a) they are concerned with non-material phenomena; (b) they work for quality of life, rather for merely life; (c) they are cooperative and non-conflictive; (d) they are followers-oriented rather than leader oriented; (e) they are decentralized, rather than centralized ones.

The new social movements include the women’s movement, the ecology movement, gay rights movements and various peace movements among others. Thinkers have related these movements with post materialism hypothesis as put forth by Ronald Inglehart. Important contributors in the field include sociologists such as Alain Touraine, Claus Offe and Habermas. Many of the movements tend to emphasize social change in lifestyle and culture, rather than pushing specific changes in public policy or for economy change. Some theorists argue that the key actors in these movements are the members of “new middle class” or “service sector professionals”, such as academics. They are informal loosely organize network of ‘supporters’ rather than members. Paul Byrne described new social movements as ‘relatively disorganized’. Some of the new social movements can be summed up here as under.

Environment Movement

It is a term which is also used to include the conservation and green movements. It is a diverse scientific, social and political movement which addresses the concern of environment. In general terms, the environmentalists advocate the sustainable movement of natural resources. The movement is centered around ecology, health and human rights. Its basis is very broad, including private citizens, professionals, statesmen, intellectual and the like. Among its advocates, we may mention Thoreau (Walden, or Life of Woods), and Marsh between 1830 and 1960. During 1960s and 1970s, mention may be made about Rachel Carson (Silent Spring), Paul R. Ehrlich (The population Bomb) and the like.

The scope of movement includes the Environmental Movement is broad in scope and can include any topic related to the environment conservation, and biology, as well as preservation of landscape, flora and fauna for a variety of purpose and uses.

The Conservation Movement seeks to protect natural areas for sustainable consumption, as well as traditional and spiritual use.

Environmental Health Movement dates at least to Progressive era, and focuses on urban standards such as clean water, efficient sewage handling, and stable population growth. Environmental health could also deal with nutritive medicine, aging, preventive medicine and other concerns specific to human well being. Environmental health is also seen as an indicator
for the state of the natural environment, or an early warning system for what may human to humans.

Environmental justice is a movement that began in the US. in 1980s and seeks to end environmental racism and prevent low income minorities communities from an unbalanced exposure to highways, garbage dumps and factories. The environment justice movement seeks to link “social” and “ecological” environmental concerns, while at the same time preventing the de facto classism, and racism.

Deep ecology is often concerned to be a spiritual spinoff of the ecology movement.

Bright Green environmentalism is currently a popular sub-movement, which emphasizes the idea that through technology, good design and more thoughtful use of energy and resources, people can live responsible, sustainable live while enjoying prosperity.

**Socio-Religious Reform Movements**

Reforms movements are movements which are organized to carry reforms in some specific areas. Usually such movements use legitimate means within larger framework of the society and without disturbing the existing framework. The Brahmo Samaj led by Raj Ram Mohan Roy, Arya Samaj Movement by Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Ali Garh Movement by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, and Ramakrishna Movement by Swami Vivekananda are some example of socio-religious movements of 19th century India.

Brahmo Samaj: The phrase *Brahmo Samaj* literally means the society of the worshippers of the One True God. *Brahmo* means one who worships Brahma, the Supreme Spirit of the universe and *Samaj* means a community of men. The Brahmo Samaj therefore represents a body of men who want to establish the worship of the Supreme Being in spirit as opposed to the prevailing idolatry of the land. The movement was started by Raja Rammohan Roy and his friends by opening a place for public worship on the Chitpore Road in Calcutta, and was duly and publicly inaugurated in January 1830 by the consecration of the first house of prayer, now known as the Adi Brahmo Samaj.

Arya Samaj: The founder of the *Arya Samaj* was Swami Dayananda Saraswati, who was born in Kathiawar in 1824. This Samaj is more of a social institution, with a religious background. It has Gurukulas, schools, and Pathshalas. The Suddhi Sabha is a proselytizing branch of the *Arya Samaj*. The followers of the *Arya Samaj* do not perform idol worship. Swami Dayanand Saraswati wrote "Satyarth Parkash" (Light of Truth).

Aligarh Movement was the movement led by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, to educate the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent after the defeat of the rebels in the Indian rebellion of 1857. It had enormous success and had a profound impact on the future of the subcontinent. It’s most significant achievement was the establishment of Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh, which later became Aligarh Muslim University. Almost all the reformers were influenced by the modern science and rationality and the conclusion of humanism. But from the
nature’s point of view, there were some differences in these movements. In some reforms the dependence on Western thought was more.

For example Arya Samaj, Theosophical Society etc. were dependent on the past and on other hand Brahma Samaj, Prathana Samaj and Rahnumai Majdayasan Sabha were influenced by Western thought.

If we have an overall look at 19th century socio-religious reform movement’s nature, it becomes clear that this movement was associated with urban middle class and upper class which rationalism and religious universalism put importance on the social system reforms and modernisation. In the realm of culture emphasis was on religious and philosophical field, and art, music, science and technology etc. were benefited less comparatively. In modern National Movement, socio-religious reform played the prime role. Those reforms helped Indians to have comparatively more self-confidence, self-respect and the feelings of patriotism. Those movements helped introduced to all Indians political and social freedom, equality and friendship. From these, humanity and morality among the common people spreaded and the feelings of political freedom and modern development raised. Naturally socio-religious reforms played a very important role in the formation of the base for National Movement.

**Peasant Movement**

Peasant movement is a movement led by the peasants which seeks facilities and concessions so to better their lot. The history of peasants’ movement, in India can be traced back to colonial period, when repressive economic policies, the new land revenue system, the colonial administrative and judicial system and the ruin of handicrafts leading to the overcrowding of land transformed the agrarian structure and impoverished the peasantry. The peasant movements occupy an important place in the history of social unrest in India tough the aims and objectives of these movements differ in nature and degree from the region to region. It is in this sense that these movements also aim at unification of peasants of a region, development of leadership, ideology and a peasant elite. Through these movements emerge a new power structure and peasant alliance. The genesis of peasant movement rest in the different relationship patterns of different social categories existing within the framework of feudal and semi-feudal structure of our society. In the post-independence period the nature and objectives of peasant movement have changed to getting remunerative prices for agricultural produce, to increase agricultural production, to establish parity between prices of agricultural produce and industrial goods, and to get minimum wages for the agricultural laborers. Some of the peasants movement, including uprisings, can be stated as these: Sanyasi Rebellion (1770), Wahabi Uprising (1831), Santhai Uprising (1855), Indigo Revolt (1859), Punjab Kisan Struggle (1890-1900), Champaran Satyagraha (1917-18), Telangana Movement (1946), Naxalbari Movement (1957).

Agrarian movements in contemporary India may be broadly classified into two main categories. The first type of movements is those of the poor, the marginal or small peasants. These movements voice the demands related to their economic condition, for example, demand of the
agricultural labourers for higher wages and better working conditions. The second type of movements is of the more prosperous peasants, those who produce a considerable surplus within the rural economy. These movements are often in social science literature referred to as ‘Farmers’ Movement’ or ‘New Agrarianism’ or ‘New Peasant Movements’.

The first category of movements dated back to the colonial period. Kathleen Gough in 1974 found that in India 77 peasant uprisings took place since the British period (Gough 1974). In the initial years the sporadic movements were directed against the extraction of the Zamindars and other forms of intermediaries. We shall see later that these movements were and are around the grievances of the rural poor and in the pre independence years they developed in close connection with the national movement. The second category of movement has arisen in recent years in the Green revolution areas such as in western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab or southwestern Maharashtra or in the far south such as Karnataka or Tamil Nadu and it is the rich and the middle peasants, the prosperous within the rural economy that organise and lead it. These movements have become much more prominent in recent years. The movements target the state, the bureaucratic apparatus and demand among other things concessions from the state like, rise in the remunerative prices for crops, decrease in the prices of agricultural inputs, providing electricity at a cheap rate etc. By focussing on the decline in the terms of trade over the years they also have created and highlighted a distinction between the ‘town’ and the ‘country’ and some of the leaders (for example, Sharad Joshi of the Shetkari Sangathana) emphasises that ‘Bharat’ is being exploited by ‘India’.

References


Questions

1. Explain the types of social movements as given by Aberle.
2. Elucidate the various social movements in India.
3. Explain the factors leading to tribal movements in India.
4. Discuss various socio-religious movements in India.
5. Discuss different environmental movements in India.