

New social movements: Advocacy for the protection of human rights

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Abstract

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. The new social movements in India are women's movement, the ecology movement, movement against corruption and various peace movements among others. The aim of the Present paper is to analysis the various new movements on human rights perspective.

Keywords: emergence of social movements, social movements pay, emphasising on human rights

Introduction

Democracy is largely understood as popular sovereignty where people have control over the decision made by the state. Since it is not practically possible for the people in the modern democratic societies to participate in the decision making process of the state directly, they do so through representatives. But when political parties become ineffective in representing the interest of the people, we see the emergence of social movements (SMs). It is a truism that no society is static. Space, processes and nature as well as the direction of social change vary from time to time and society to society. Social movements are nothing new and they are taking place all around the globe, whether, they are based on certain issues or interests, under different institutional environments. In India also social movements have taken place around identity issues or interest based activism. Social movements play an important role in escalating not only the processes of change, but also in giving direction to social transformation. Till the 1960s, sociologists' interest in social movements was largely focused on sanskritisation and socio-religious reform movements, excluding the political dimension as beyond their scope. It is sometimes argued that the freedom of expression, education and relative economic independence prevalent in the modern Western culture are responsible for the unprecedented number and scope of various contemporary social movements.

A brief history of Social Movements in India

The first human rights group in the country, the Civil Liberties Union was formed by Jawaharlal Nehru and some of his associates in the early 1930s with the aim of providing legal support to nationalists accused of sedition against the colonial authorities. In 1936, Jawaharlal Nehru came forward to form the first civil liberties organisation. The Indian Civil Liberties Union (ICLU) was established in Bombay in 1936 with Rabindranath Tagore as its president. Nehru said in his address to the founding conference of the ICLU, that the notion of civil liberties is to have the right to oppose the government. In 1945, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru brought forth a constitutional proposal emphasising the importance of fundamental rights. They were integrated in the Indian constitution. Thus, liberties and rights protected in the Indian

constitution were product of the freedom struggle of the people of India. The historical interpretation of the civil rights movements during the colonial period is vague and very brief.

New Social Movements in India

JP Movement

By the beginning of 1973 Indira Gandhi's popularity began to decline. People's expectations were unfulfilled. Little dent was not being made in rural or urban poverty or economic inequality, nor was there any lessening of caste and class oppression in the countryside. The immediate provocation for the rising discontent was the marked deterioration in the economic situation. A combination of recession, growing unemployment, rampant inflation and scarcity of foodstuffs created a serious crisis. The burden of feeding and sheltering nearly 10 million refugees from Bangladesh during 1971 had depleted the grain reserves and, combined with the cost of the Bangladesh war, had led to a large budgetary deficit. The war had also drained foreign exchange reserves. Monsoon rains failed for two years in succession during 1972 and 1973, leading to a terrible drought in most parts of the country and a massive shortage of food grains, and fuelling their prices. The drought also led to a drop in power generation and combined with the fall in agricultural production, and therefore in the demand for manufactured goods, led to industrial recession and rise in unemployment. The year 1973 also witnessed the notorious oil shock when world prices of crude oil increased four-fold, leading to massive increase in the prices of petroleum products and fertilizers. This drained foreign reserves, further increased the budgetary deficit and deepened economic recession. With all this, prices rose continuously, by 22 per cent in 1972-73 alone. The price rise, which affected both the poor and the middle classes, was accompanied by scarcity of essential articles of consumption. There were food riots in several parts of the country. To tackle from this situation Indira Gandhi imposed internal emergency. JP started movement against emergency the main justification of the JP Movement was that it arose to end corruption in Indian life and politics, whose fountainhead was ostensibly Mrs Gandhi, and to defend democracy which was threatened by her authoritarian personality and style of politics and administration. JP often accused Indira Gandhi of

trying to destroy all democratic institutions and establish a Soviet-backed dictatorship in her hunger for power. Her continuation in office, he said, was 'incompatible with the survival of democracy in India'.² Later, many other critics and opponents of Mrs Gandhi expressed similar views. JP now repeatedly toured the entire country and drew large crowds especially in Delhi and other parts of North India which were Jan Sangh or Socialist strongholds. The JP Movement attracted wide support especially from students, middle classes, traders and a section of the intelligentsia.

Save Silent Valley Movement, 1973

Save Silent Valley Movement social movement aimed at the protection of Silent Valley, an evergreen tropical forest in the Palakkad district of Kerala, started in 1973 brought many activists and people together. The protest was focused on stopping the valley from being flooded by a hydroelectric project. The controversy surrounding the valley still exists and people are still waiting for the final result.

Chipko Movement, 1973

The Chipko Movement was started in the early 1970s when a group of women opposed the cutting down of trees in the northern Himalayan segment of Uttar Pradesh, the area that is well known as Uttarakhand. The word "chipko" refers "to stick" or "to hug". The name of the movement comes from a word meaning "embrace": where the villagers hug the trees, saving them by interposing their bodies between them and the contractors' axes. This became popular as "Chipko movement". Chipko movement is a grass root level movement, which started in response to the needs of the people of Uttarakhand. The rate of heavy depletion of forests was resulting in destruction, arid- making the Himalayan mountain range barren. Moreover, the construction of dams, factories and roads had already led to deforestation.

Narmada Bachao Andolan, 1985

Narmada Bachao Andolan is the most powerful mass movement, started in 1985, against the construction of huge dam on the Narmada River. Narmada is the India's largest west flowing river, which supports a large variety of people with distinguished culture and tradition ranging from the indigenous (tribal) people inhabited in the jungles here to the large number of rural population. The proposed Sardar Sarovar Dam and Narmada Sagar will displace more than 250,000 people. The big fight is over the resettlement or the rehabilitation of these people. The two proposals are already under construction, supported by US\$550 million loan by the World Bank. There are plans to build over 3000 big and small dams along the river.

Narmada Bachao Andolan Led by one of the prominent leader Medha Patkar, it has now been turned into the International protest, gaining support from NGO'S all around the globe. Protestors are agitating the issue through the mass media, hunger strikes, massive marches, rallies and the through the on screen of several documentary films. Although they have been protesting peacefully, but they been harassed, arrested and beaten up by the police several times. The Narmada Bachao Andolan has been pressurizing the World Bank to withdraw its loan from the project through media.

The strong protests throughout the country not only made impact on the local people but has also influenced the several

famous celebrities like film star Aamir Khan, who has made open efforts to support Narmada Bachao Andolan. He said he only want that those who have been rendered homeless should be given a roof. He pleaded to the common people to take part in the moment and come up with the best possible solutions.

Jan Lokpal Bill Anti-Corruption Movement by Anna Hazare, 2011

When anti-corruption activist Anna Hazare began a hunger strike at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on April 5, 2011, the whole nation came together and stood by him. The movement led to the resignation of Agriculture minister Sharad Pawar from the group of ministers that had been charged with reviewing the draft Jan Lokpal bill. The initiative brought together a huge number of people, making it a one-of-its-kind event in decades. It was also one of those rare events that demonstrated what is possible if the world's largest democracy woke up to take the reins in its hands.

Nirbhaya Movement, 2012

The 2012 Delhi Gang Rape saw one of the angriest reactions from people who were very clear on expressing that they have had enough. After the incident, thousands of people came out on streets to protest in several parts of the country. The movement also created a stir in social media where people changed their display picture to a black dot and tens of thousands of people signed a petition protesting the incident. Taking the movement into consideration, the government at the centre and various states announced several steps to ensure the safety of women.

Social Movements advocacy for Human Rights Protection

The notion of human rights is founded on core values of freedom, equality, equity and justice. It insists on equality of treatment for all and no discrimination against anyone. Human rights are basic guarantees of entitlements and freedoms that every human being must enjoy in order to be able to live a life of dignity and pursue opportunities to realise one's full potential. New social movements emerge around new scopes and range of politics. The environment, the rights, right of women, right to health, right to food and nutrition, education, shelter and housing, the dispensation of justice, communications and the dissemination of information, culture and lifestyle.

Conclusion

The sphere of the human rights movement no longer remained confined to the protection and promotion of civil and political rights of the people. It went on to encompass almost all spheres of human activity to ensure that the basic rights of the people are infringed in any way and anywhere. The governmental efforts in this context came in the form setting up national as well state human rights commissions to look into the issues of human rights. However, even after these substantive initiatives, the numerous cases of violations of the human rights remain a burning issue in the liberal-democratic polity of India. Hence, despite facing a number of challenges and problems, the formidable role of the human rights bodies remain intact in the country as long as the circumstances and scope exist for the violation of human rights of the helpless and vulnerable masses.

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