**Social Movements in India**

**Social Movements in India: Meaning, Features**

A social movement is a mass movement and a collective attempt of people to bring about a change, or to resist any change. The concept central to any social movement is that people intervene in the process of social change, rather than remaining mere spectators or passive participants in the ebb and flow of life.

People seek to become proactive actors in altering the course of history. In order to achieve their aim of making a difference to the world they live in, they either initiate or become a part of collective action. Individuals consciously act together with a sense of engagement in a common enterprise.

Social movements possess a considerable measure of internal order and purposeful orientation. It is, in fact, this organization that strengthens the movement to challenge the established institutions. A social movement can be described more or less as a persis­tent and organized effort on the part of a relatively large group of people to bring about or resist change. However, the number of persons participating is not the criteria for describing any movement as a collective action.

The movement must have a leader to guide and execute the plan of action and possess the power to sustain the movement. Social movements, however, are different from pressure groups or institutional movements. Institutional movements are highly organized, permanent, and primarily occupation-based. Social movements are spontaneous and need not be issue-specific.

**Meaning and Definitions of Social Movements:**

Social movements can be viewed as collective enterprises to establish a new order of life. They have their inception in the condition of unrest, and derive their motive power on one hand from dissatisfaction with the current form of life, and on the other hand, from wishes and hopes for a new scheme or system of living. —Herbert Blumer

Mass movements mobilize people who are alienated from the going system, who do not believe in the legitimacy of the established order, and who therefore are ready to engage in efforts to destroy it. The greatest number of people available to mass movement will be found in those sections of society that have the fewest ties to the social order. —William Kornhauser

Social movements are those organized efforts, on the part of excluded groups, to promote or resist changes in the structure of society that involve recourse to non-institutional forms of political participation. —Doug McAdam

Rather than seeing social movements as expressions of extremism, violence, and depri­vation, they are better defined as collective challenges, based on common purposes and special solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities. —Sidney Tarrow

A movement is not merely a perpetuated crowd, since a crowd does not possess organizational and motivational mechanisms capable of sustaining membership through periods of inaction and waiting. Furthermore, crowd mechanisms cannot be used to achieve communication and coordination of activity over a wide area, such as a nation or continent.

A social movement is a collectivity or a collective enterprise. The individual member experiences a sense of membership in an alliance of people who share his dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs and his vision of a better order. —Encyclopedia Britannica

Movements are something that people create to press for social change. Sociological definitions of movements stress on qualities such as collective and innovative behavior, the shifting and fluid boundaries of movement membership, and the willingness of members to disrupt order a little or a lot.

Social movements are generally seen as phenomena of the modern era and industrialized society whether located in the “First” world or not. Industrialization and urbanization, technological advancements, and ongoing democratization have allowed people to push for change collectively, and question the legitimacy of the existing order. Social movements can be defined as collective challenges based on common purposes.

It is a collective enterprise acting with some continuity to promote or resist a change in society. It is made up of a group with indefinite and shifting membership. In general, the leadership of such movements is determined by informal response of the members rather than by formal procedures that legitimize the authority. Gerlach and Hine have identified five key factors, which are operationally significant, and become the basis of a true movement.

**The five key factors are:**

i. Any social movement involves a group or collectivity, comprising different units, segmented on the basis of personal, structural, or ideological ties.

ii. The group includes individuals committed to the cause, who use their preexisting, significant social relationships to convince others to join the movement.

iii. For any movement to become successful there should be commitment to the movement. It also involves a separation, in a significant way, from the established order. The efforts of others, or one’s own experience bring forth a new set of values and induce changed patterns of behavior in individuals.

iv. The result is the emergence of an ideology, which codifies values and goals, and provides a conceptual framework by which goals maybe interpreted. The ideology also motivates change, defines opposition, and provides a basis for the unification of a segmented network of groups.

v. Real or perceived opposition from a society at large or from that segment of the established order, within which the movement has arisen, is also an important aspect of any social movement. In fact, it is this opposition that unifies the varying segments involved in a social movement.

A social movement arises when there emerges an issue or a set of issues that affect a significant proportion of people in some way or the other. Gradually, these issues start gaining importance and result in mass participation of people and in collective action. According to Smelser, “Collective movements refer to collective efforts to modify norms and values, which frequently (but not always) develop over longer periods of time.”

There are significant differences between collective action and movements. Forms of collective action such as riots, revolts, and revolution involve violent group outbursts. Some collective actions (crowds and riots) are generally unstructured and short-lived, whereas rebellion, revolution, and movements are more structured.

A riot is defined as an outbreak of temporary but violent mass disorder, which breaks out suddenly, carries fire and fury against a target or group, and dies in a short period, leaving behind death and destruction. Riots are an index of general unrest within the society. Revolt refers to a mass insurrection, or an uprising by some sections of society against the authority. It is an organized act of rising against, or breaking away from the established system of authority.

Rebellion refers to an opposition by the masses against the authority, not against persons or groups. Rebellion is confined to the efforts on the part of a portion of the state to overthrow the authority. Revolutions are highly organized political move­ments with a widespread public participation and designed to overthrow the regime or dissolve the state. Revolutions are generally accompanied by extensive violence. Revolution signifies the revolt of all sections of the society and their participation in the total dismantling of the state.

All social movements are collective actions, but all collective actions need not necessarily be social movements. A social movement may lead to, or transform itself into a revolution. A social movement may or may not be a mobilization of people against the state or system of governance, and may or may not involve violence.

Social move­ments generally mobilize members or participants to seek redressal of a grievance, or to struggle for specific goals and objectives. They often involve only a particular section of a population and manifest themselves only in a part of society. Social movements refer to a sustained and continuous collective action over a long period of time. Social movements generally aim at and result in change.

**Features and Causes of Social Movements:**

**Some of the features of social movements are as follows:**

i. The sense of belonging and group consciousness is very important for a social movement. Such consciousness can be brought about through active participation of the group members.

ii. Social movements lead to the creation of an entirely new social, economic, and political order.

iii. Most of the social movements tend to develop a new set of ideas, which become obligatory for the members of the group to adopt and follow.

iv. It is obvious that the social movements involve collective action rather than indi­vidual action.

v. Social movements may be organized or unorganized.

vi. Social movements may be peaceful in nature or they may also turn violent.

vii. The aim of a social movement is to bring about or resist social change in the society.

viii. The life of the social movement is not certain. This is because it may continue for a long period or it may die out soon.

**Causes:**

According to Vidya Bhushan Sachdeva (p. 285), social movements do not just happen. It is social unrest which gives rise to a social movement.

**The social unrest may be caused by the following factors:**

**i. Cultural Drifts:**

The society undergoes constant changes. The values and behavior are changing all the time in civilized societies. In the course of cul­tural drift, most people develop new ideas. To get these ideas operative in the society they organize a movement.

The development of a democratic society, the emancipation of women, the spread of mass education, the removal of untouchability, the equality of opportunity for both the sexes, and the growth of secularism are some examples of cultural drift.

**ii. Social Disorganization:**

A changing society is, to some extent, disorganized because changes in different parts of the society do not take place simultaneously. One part changes more rapidly than the other, thereby producing numerous lags. Industrialization has brought about urbanization which in turn has caused numerous social problems.

Social disorganization brings confusion and uncer­tainty, because the old traditions no longer form a dependable guide to behav­ior, and individuals become rootless. They feel isolated from society. A feeling develops that the community leaders are indifferent to their needs. Individuals feel insecure, confused, and frustrated. Confusion and frustration lead to social movements.

**iii. Social Injustice:**

When a group of people feel that injustice was done to them, they become frustrated and alienated. Such feeling of injustice provides fertile soil for social movements. The feeling of social injustice is not limited to the miserable poor. Any group, at any status level, may come to feel itself the victim of social injustice.

The wealthy class may feel a sense of injustice when faced with urban property ceiling law—or high taxes—intended to benefit the poor. Social injustice is a subjective value judgment. A social system is unjust when it is so perceived by its members. Thus, social movements occur when­ever such kind of social situation arises. In a stable and well-integrated society, the chances for social movements are very rare.

It is understood that people living in such a society are contented and satisfied. In a disorganized and con­tinuously changing society, social movements occur more frequently, as most people are dissatisfied with the existing conditions. Lack of social justice also makes people dissatisfied and paves the way for social movements. Modern society is more afflicted with social movements than the earlier societies.

**Various Theories of Social Movements:**

There are basically five theories that describe the rationale of the people undertaking a joint-action. Various opinions are expressed with regard to the cause of social move­ments. One set of observers is of the view that the roots of any movement are found in social misery, social, and economic deprivation.

Another set of observers is of the opin­ion that the widespread discontentment and oppression are the causes for social move­ments. It is also stated that the conditions for living in a society are becoming intolerable which prompt people to take part in social movements.

**The following is a brief explana­tion of each of the approach theories:**

**i. Mass Society Theory:**

William Kornhauser advocated the Mass Society Theory in 1959. He suggested that mass society is impersonal, industrialized, and highly bureaucratized. Socially isolated people who feel personally low join movements, where they feel they can achieve something. The emptiness felt by such people is filled by social movements as they bring about a sense of belonging.

He also observed that in a society where the social ties are weaker, there are more chances of social movements. Sociologist such as Dough McAdam explained that the main reason for people to risk their lives in social movements is their strong desire to set right the wrongs and to over­come the injustices. They also try not to isolate themselves as they are firmly rooted in families and communities (Henslin, p. 609).

**ii. Deprivation Theory:**

According to this theory, people deprived of things deemed valuable in the society—whether money, justice, status, or privileges— join social movements with the hope of redressing their grievances. This theory was well explained by Karl Marx. He stated that excessive capitalistic exploitation leads to impoverishment of the working classes, which compels them to overthrow their oppressors. However, Karl Marx recognized that abject misery and exploitation do not necessarily result in revolutionary fervor.

He pointed out that the suffering of the under-classes, whom he labeled the Lumpen-proletariate, can be so intense and their resulting alienation can be so massive that all social and revolution­ary consciousness are dead (Vander Zanden, p. 375). Karl Marx also explained another type of deprivation called relative deprivation, which is a situation where people believe that they are being deprived of what is rightfully theirs.

It is a per­ceived disadvantage arising from some specific comparison. In such situations, people believe that they must join movements based on their evaluation of what they think they should have in comparison to what others have. However, this theory, which gives an insight into the origin and development of revolutions, also holds a surprise. Improving conditions result in a desire for even better con­ditions.

This craving for more and more can also spark off revolutions. Another explanation for the theory of relative deprivation is through the “rise and drop” of J Curve hypothesis as explained by James Davies. He contends that revolutions are likely to take place when a prolonged period of social and economic better­ment is followed by a period of sharp reversal. “People fear that the gains they achieved with great effort will be lost, and their mood becomes revolutionary.”

**iii. Resource Mobilization Theory:**

The proponents of this theory claim that it is always necessary to know the forces that energize and activate a social movement. They emphasize the factors such as the availability of resources for pursuing particular goals and the system of interpersonal relationships. It is considered important to have substantial resources for the success of any movement.

These resources include human labor, money, infrastructure and communication facilities, access to mass media, and a positive public image. People are seen to participate in social movements not as the result of deprivation, but as a response to a rational decision-making process, whereby they weigh the costs and benefits of participation (Zanden, p. 380).

In many cases, resources and organizations outside the protest group are crucial in determining the scope and outcome of collective action. External support is essential for the movement of the poor. Most of the time, the success or failure of the social movements is determined by the political factors in which they get entangled.

**iv. Structural Strain Theory:**

Neil Smelzer developed one of the most influential theories about social movements. The Structural Strain Theory identifies the following factors which encourage the development of social movements (Macionis, pp. 619 and 620):

**1. Structural Conduciveness:**

Social movements arise when people start think­ing that their society has some problems, which may include economic, social, cultural, or political problems.

**2. Structural Strain:**

When the needs or expectations of people are not met, they begin to feel a sense of relative deprivation. In Eastern Europe, the pro- democracy movements gained popularity because of the perception of the people that their standard of living was far lower than that of the people of Western Europe.

**3. Growth and Spread of an Idea:**

In order to form a well-organized social movement, there should be a clear statement of a problem, its causes and the solution(s) to the problem. Confusion regarding the problem or suffering will make people express their dissatisfaction and disillusionment in an unorganized way, i.e., through rioting.

**4. Precipitating Factors:**

There may be overt and underlying discontent, which could be transformed into a collective action by a specific event.

**5. Mobilization for Action:**

Once people share a common concern regarding a pub­lic issue, they become ready to take action. This could take the form of protest, marches, rallies, and demonstrations, distribution of leaflets, public meetings, and alliances with sympathetic organizations.

In Poland, the success of the Solidarity Movement encouraged the people of Eastern Europe to agitate for change. As reform movements gained strength, the pace of change also increased. Change, which took a decade in Poland, took only months in Hungary and weeks in other Eastern European countries.

**6. Lack of Social Control:**

The response of the politicians, officials, the police, and the military determine the success or failure of any social movement. When the state’s intervention is swift and aimed at crushing a movement, it may not succeed in its endeavor.

An example of such handling of any movement is the way the pro-democracy movement was crushed in China. However, Gorbachev adopted a policy of non-intervention in Eastern Europe, which resulted in the success of the democratic movements and brought about a widespread change.

**v. New Social Movements Theory:**

The changing character of social movements is addressed by a recent theoretical approach. This theory emphasizes the distinctive features of social movements in post-industrial societies of North America and Western Europe.

Today’s movements are international in nature and focus on global issues such as environment, global ecology, the conse­quences of war and terrorism, and so on. These movements focus on cultural and social change, not merely on economic change. These movements have the support of the middle class unlike the earlier movements, which had the strong support of the working class.

Thus, the above-mentioned theories give us an understanding as to what the reasons are that instigate people to join various social movements. These movements help people to relate the individual to the larger society and make them aware of social concerns. It is through these movements that the governments get to know the needs and demands of the people in both general and specific terms.

Social movements may be classified on the basis of purpose and interest, such as linguistic, religious, sectarian, caste, peasant, workers, tribal, ethnic, women’s, environ­mental, civil rights, and human rights movements.

On the basis of their organization or strategies adopted, they can be classified into moderate and militant, peaceful or violent, and constitutional and unconstitutional movements. With respect to the demands or goals, movements can be reformative, revolutionary, resistance, revivalist, and expressive movements.

**Stages in Social Movements:**

Though one social movement differs from another, almost all social movements go through similar stages. They are as follows (Macionis, p. 623):

**Stage 1: Emergence:**

The perception that all is not well triggers off social movements. Widespread dissatisfaction becomes the basis of other movements. Sometimes, a small vanguard (forerunner) group increases public awareness on some issues and makes it a prominent public issue.

**Stage 2: Coalescence (Blending, Union):**

Once a social issue has emerged as a move­ment, it must define itself and develop a strategy for “going public”. The leaders must determine policies and tactics, and there should be a drive to recruit new members. At this stage, collective actions such as demonstrations or rallies must be organized to attract public and media attention. Alliances with other organizations should be formed in order to gain necessary resources.

**Stage 3: Bureaucratization:**

A social movement must take on bureaucratic traits in order to become a political force. As it becomes established, the movement starts depending on the talents and charisma of its leaders and relies more on a capable staff.

If move­ments do not become established in this manner, they may face the risk of dissolution. Sometimes, bureaucratization can also hinder a social movement, as leaders may become too involved in building up the organization and not concentrate on encouraging the members towards change.

**Stage 4: Decline:**

Over a period of time, social movements lose their importance and influence. Sometimes, if the goals of the movement are fulfilled, decline simply indicates success. Organizational factors such as poor leadership, loss of interest among members, or repressive authority may also lead to the demise of a movement.

Sometimes, a social move­ment declines because the established power structure diverts leaders from their goals through different means such as offers of money, prestige, and other rewards. Cooptation or “selling out” is common, and organizational leaders use their position to enrich them­selves. Another cause for the decline of a social movement is repression.

Participants may be threatened by officials, who discourage new recruits, and even by imprisoned leaders in order to crush a social movement. Sometimes, a social movement can collapse because it may opt for “going mainstream”. Such movements may become an accepted part of system, and no longer challenge the authorities or the status quo.

**Types of Social Movements:**

The classification of social movements is not easy as a movement may have a mixed nature or may change completely at different stages during its career. However, the social movements are classified into millenarian, migratory, Utopian, expressive, reformist, rebellion, revolutionary, and resistance.

**A detailed discussion on all these social move­ments is given as follows:**

**Millenarian Movement:**

Millenarian movements are based on a belief of a religious, social, or political group that a major transformation of society will occur after which all the elements or components of the society will be changed in a positive or sometimes negative direction.

Millenarian groups typically claim that the current society and its rulers are corrupt, unjust, or otherwise wrong. They, therefore, believe that they will be destroyed soon by a powerful force. The harmful nature of the status quo is always considered intractable without the anticipated dramatic change. For instance, in medieval millenarianism the world was seen as controlled by demons, and this idea prevailed even up to the nineteenth century.

**Migratory Movement:**

These movements take place when a large number of people leave one country and settle in some other place or country. The major reasons for mass migration may be discontent or dissatisfaction with the existing situations or circum­stances or looking for new opportunities for a bright future.

Mere migration of people from one place to another cannot be called migratory movement. The Zionist Movement (the back-to-Israel movement is known as Zionism) and the movement of people from East Germany to West Germany are some examples of migratory social movements.

**Utopian Movement:**

A Utopian Movement is a movement which is expected to cre­ate an ideal social system, or a perfect society, which can only be imagined but cannot exist in reality. Utopian movements conceive man as good, co-operative, and altruistic. The most successful Utopian Movement in the recent history is the Israeli kibbutz. Sarvodaya Movement is another example of a Utopian Movement.

**Expressive Movement:**

Expressive movements arise when people are discontented and cannot easily change the unpleasant situations (i.e., they feel powerless and cannot flee from the social system) with the result that the individual comes to terms with that unpleasant reality and changes his own reactions in order to make his life bearable. One of the best examples of expressive movement is Hippie Movement.

**Reformist Movement:**

A reform movement can be described as a mass movement that seeks to change only one specific aspect of a society .The reform movement is an attempt to modify some parts of the society without completely changing the whole social system.

Most of the reform movements are possible in democratic countries as people have an opportunity to express their opinions and criticize the existing social institutions and can bring about some changes in them. The movement to abolish untouchability and dowry system, and the movement to preserve wildlife are all examples of the reform movements.

**Revolutionary Movement:**

The Revolutionary Movement aims at overthrowing the existing social system and replacing it with a new one. Revolutionary movements are quite opposite to the reform movements. Revolutionists generally believe that reform is not possible under the existing social system.

Usually, revolutionary movements arise when people have no other alternative to reform the social system other than changing it as a whole. Revolution serves as an alternative to the individuals to come out of their existing misery. The communist revolution in Russia and China are the examples of revolutionary movements.

**Resistance Movement:**

A resistance movement can be described as a movement that arises not only for the purpose of instituting change, but also to block change or to eliminate a previously instituted change. Revolutionary movements arise as people are dissatisfied and feel that the pace of social change is very slow, whereas resistance movements occur when people consider that the change is rapid. The movement against Hindi of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam is a typical example of resistance movement.

**Revivalist Movement:**

A revivalist movement seeks to take the system back to its original pristine purity. Most of the movements try to involve people in the political process and bring about political awareness among the people. Some movements aim at bringing about a change in the lives of certain sections of society, such as the downtrodden as well as women.