# Social Movements and Social Change in India : A Conceptual Framework

*Sanghamitra Jena*
*Nupur Pattanaik*

**Abstract**

Social Mobilization began in India in the year 1970's.They gained a variety of names such as people's movement, popular movement, etc. These movements emerged and highlighted some of the major issues such as gender and environment. The major agendas of them as "Movements of landless, unorganized labour in rural and urban areas, Adivasis, Dalits, displaced people, peasants, urban poor, small entrepreneurs and unemployed youth took up issues of livelihood,opportunities,dignity and development and now women movements". These movements largely distanced themselves from political parties or tried to cut across the ideologies of the political parties. Yet many of them rooted themselves or drew from ideologies of the various shades environmentalisms or gender politics or socialism. Previously there were old social movements which have made changes in our country from time to time. There are innumerable movements, and therefore it is difficult to provide a precise classification of social movements. These are classified as old and new social movements. Such citizen based movements are not new to our country. In the past, India has seen some of the most powerful people's movements such as which led to some of the landmark decisions and brought the entire nation together.Swadeshi Movement-1905, Satyagraha,Chipko Movement-1973, Narmada Bachao Andolan, Jan Lokpal Bill, Nirbhaya Movement,etc. This paper tried to reflect how social movements have brought about social change in India, what are the different types of social movements, what are the theories relating to these movements and how can these movements act as a catalyst in bringing about change in our country. In a society a large number of changes have been brought about by efforts exerted by people individually or collectively. A social movement is defined as a collectively acting with some continuity to promote or resist a change in the society or a group of which it is a part. Social movement is a form of dynamic pluralistic behavior that progressively develops structure through time and aims at partial or complete modification of the social order.

## 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. However, others point out that many of the social movements of the last hundred years grown up, like the Mau in Kenya, to oppose Western colonialism. Either way, social movements have been and continued to be closely connected with democratic political systems. Occasionally, social movements have been involved in democratizing nations, but more often they have flourished after democratization. From the early 1970s new forms of social mobilization began in India. They gained a variety of names such as social movement, people's movement, popular movements etc. These movements emerged and highlighted some of the major issues such as gender and environment.

In a society a large number of changes have been brought about by efforts exerted by people individually and collectively. Such efforts have been called social movements. A social movement is defined as a collectively acting with some continuity to promote or resist a change in the society or group of which it is a part. Social movement is a form of dynamic pluralistic behavior that progressively develops structure through time and aims at partial or complete modification of the social order. A social movement may also be directed to resist a change. Some movements are directed to modify certain aspects of the existing

social order whereas others may aim to change it completely. The former are called reform movements and the latter are called revolutionary movements. Social movements may be of numerous kinds such as religious movements, reform movements or revolutionary movements. It is an effort by a group, its aim is to bring or resist a change in society, it may be organized or unorganized, it may be peaceful or violent, its life is not certain. It may continue for a long period or may die out soon.

Various proponents of social movements have introduced from time to time discussion on social movements as a series of contentious performances, displays and campaigns by which ordinary people make collective claims on others, as collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity, in sustained interactions with elites, opponents and authorities. Objectives, ideology, programmes, leadership, and organization are important components of social movements. They are interdependent, influencing each other. These social movements then bring about change in the social, economic and political environment and thereby, become a social force themselves. M.S.A. Rao defined social movement as a 'sustained collective mobilization through either informal or formal organization or which is generally oriented towards bringing about change'. Social movements involve: a) Collective mass mobilization, b) Collective mass support, c) Formal or informal organization, d) A conscious commitment towards its aims and beliefs and e) Deliberative collective action towards change. Social movements can be identified the major agendas of them as "Movements of landless, unorganized labour in rural and urban areas, Adivasis, Dalits, displaced people, peasants, urban poor, small entrepreneurs and unemployed youth took up the issues of livelihood, opportunities, dignity and development. "Most

well-known movements in the country are Chipko movement, Save Silent Valley, Narmada Bachao Andolan, Koel Karo, Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha, Jhola Aandolan Chutmarika (fighting polythene), Appiko movement, Save Kudremukh, Lok Satta Movement, Swadhyay Movement, Swatantra Sharad Joshi, Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha.These movements largely distanced themselves from political parties, or tried to cut across the ideologies of the political parties. Yet many of them rooted themselves or drew from ideologies of the Mahatma Gandhi, various shades environmentalisms or gender politics, or socialism. There are two types of movements that are old and new and several theories that guide these movements.

### Swadeshi Movement – 1905

The movement which started during India's struggle for freedom focused on removing the British Empire from power by becoming Swadesh i.e.self-sufficient. A lot of Indians came forward in support of the movement and boycotted foreign goods. They burnt all the imported clothes they had, boycotted British products and revived the production of domestic commodities. It gave people the power to speak against the authority and the courage to express their views.

### Satyagraha

Probably one of the most noted movements in Indian history, Satyagraha brought thousands of people together in a peaceful way. The non-violence movement started by Mahatma Gandhi to send the British back to their country and leave India free of foreign rule did eventually taste success.

### Save Silent Valley Movement – 1973

A 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

Based on Gandhian principles, the Chipko Movement or Chipko Andolan saw people protesting against deforestation by hugging trees to stop them from being cut. Led by Chandni Prasad Bhatt and Sunderlal Bahuguna, the protest started in the early 1970s when a group of women opposed the cutting down of trees. Their actions spread like wildfire and hundreds and thousands of people across India came out in support of the green movement.

**Peasant movement** - have a long history that can be traced to the numerous peasant uprisings that occurred in various regions of the world throughout human history. Early peasant movements were usually the result of stresses in the feudal and semi feudal societies, and resulted in violent uprisings. More recent movements, fitting the definitions of social movements, are usually much less violent, and their demands are centered on better prices for agricultural produce, better wages and working conditions for the agricultural laborers, and increasing the agricultural production. The economic policies of British adversely affected the Indian peasants. The British Govt. used to protect the landlords and money lenders. They exploited the peasants. The peasants rose in revolt against this injustice on many occasions. The peasants in Bengal formed their union and revolted against the compulsion of cultivating indigo. Anthony Pereira, a political scientist, has defined a peasant movement as a "social movement made up of peasants (small landholders or farm workers on large farms), usually inspired by the goal of

improving the situation of peasants in a nation or territory.

**Namantar Andolan – 1978**

It was a Dalit movement to change the name of Marathwada University in Aurangabad to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University. This 16 year long movement was successful in 1994 when the 'compromise' name of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University was accepted. The movement saw several protests which led to terrible consequences including killings, molestation, burning of houses, etc. of Dalit's.

**Jungle Bachao Andolan – 1980s**

When the government decided to replace the natural sal forest with highly valued teak, the tribal of Bihar came out in strong numbers to protest against this decision. Having started in Bihar, the movement spread to other states like Odisha and Jharkhand too.

**Narmada Bachao Andolan – 1985**

This protest, to express the views against a large number of dams being constructed near the Narmada River, brought a large number of *adivasis*, farmers, environmentalists, and human rights activists together. The movement involved prominent celebrities and people went on hunger strikes to show their support for the cause. The decision is still pending, though the court initially ruled the decision in the Andolan's favor, thereby affecting an immediate stoppage of work at the dam and directing the concerned states to first complete the rehabilitation and replacement process. Later the court allowed the construction to proceed.

**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. The movement was named among the "Top 10 News Stories of 2011" by Time Magazine.

**Nirbhaya Movement – 2012 (Women movement)**

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 Movement in Odisha**

There are various social movements which have taken place in Odisha like caste-based movements, tribal movements, linguistic movement, etc., which have taken place from time to time, but the most famous movement was the Anti-Posco Movement that took place in Odisha in the year 2010, it was a huge mass movement to protect the land, environmental and human rights.

**Social Movement and Social Change**

Social movements justify the successful function of a civil society, where there is expression

and direct actions of human rights for better growth and sustenance and human resource is addressed. Social Movement is the most effective institution in producing social change. Social Movements bring social change in our society. It paves way for the awareness of the people on different issues and from time to time we find change in our policies, programmes, only because of social movements taking place in our society. Each and every type of movement like it may be educating a girl child movement, women's movement we find there is a lot of awareness among the people on women's issues and we find from time to time due to these movements we find policies in our country for women and many other changes. There is huge sensitization among the masses, due to these movements but as well as we see that despite these movements there still continues violence against women in each and every sphere. Not only this but also Peasant's Movements that are taking place in our society are creating a lot of avenues for the farmers. Ecological Movements are there, which tries to prevent environment, still there is awareness among individual, but still we come across a lot of environmental issues. Human Rights Movements, Anti-Corruption Movements, Anti-Rape Movements, so there are various types of movements. These social movements bring about social change in our country but still we find social movements fails to bring about a complete change in our country.

**Conclusion**

So there is a need of strong awakening of a strong civil society group, though we find a lot of civil society groups prevailing in our society from time to time but it hasn't brought in the total transformation of society; still we come across a lot of awareness on various issues which can be said to be a partial change, not a complete change in our society. Social Movement itself is a sign panel of citizenship and gives rise to expression of needs and well-being.

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Mrs.Sanghamitra Jena, Reader &HOD (Department of Sociology), Rajdhani College, Bhubaneswar.

Nupur Pattanaik, Ph.D., Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, Ravenshaw University, Cuttack.