

Understanding New Social Movements: In Reference to An Analysis on New Social Movements in India

¹Pritam Jyoti Pegu

Abstract:

With growing time, the world socio-political as well as geo-strategical conditions are changing to meet the needs and aspirations of the people. People are using different methods and techniques to express their voices over diverse issues. The New Social Movements that are called as new because they highlight new issues, culture, tradition etc. and experienced mass participation of the people. Theoretically, the idea of new social movement emerged in Europe in 1960s' in response to traditional analysis of social movements and try to bring some radical changes. With time it incorporates new dimensions, scope and arena of study that gives it a distinct place in the study of social science. Hence, in this paper an attempt will be made to understand the meaning of new social movements, how they are different from earlier forms of movements and understanding its relevance today. Besides, this paper will also give an account of the rise of new social movement in India.

Key words: *Collective effort, LGBTQ, Environment, Human Security, Rights of people*

I. Introduction:

‘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

Social Movement in common words refers to the mass movement and collective efforts of the people to bring about a change or to resist any change. The New Social Movements are a recent course of mass action with new issues which remained untouched for quite a long time. These types of movements can be considered as vehicles of cumulative change in the social, economic and political fields. The term new social movement emerged as a theory in mid-1960s' which try to bring specific changes in the identity, lifestyle and culture that influence the public policy making process. Being a post-world war II phenomena, it covers a wide range of political, environmental, economic issues having new scope which made it different from earlier kinds of social movements. The issues related to environment, new insights on the rights of women, civil rights for LGBTQ community, issues related to food security, health, corruption, globalization, anti-nuclear movement, counter terrorism etc. all comes under the banner of new social movements.

¹MA in Political Science, Gauhati University

India, like many other nations of the globe experienced this wave of newness in the movements that took place in recent time on its land. With growing time and changing world socio-political structure, Indian masses are also gaining experience from the outer world in put forwarding their message through collective efforts. Be it Chipko movement of 1974 in Uttarakhand and Narmada BachaoAndolan of 1989 or the recent #MeToo movement and anti-CAA protest, issues related to rights and justice of men are gaining new endeavor. These movements can be considered as the base upon which the voices for the rights and justice can be raised. This paper is an attempt to analyze the new forms of social movements that are taking place and how they are relevant in todays' era.

Objectives:

The objectives of the paper can be summarized as follows,

- To evaluate and analyze the theoretical base of new social movements.
- To make an account of new social movements in India i.e. in post-independence era.
- To interpret the relevance and authenticity of new social movements today.

II. Methodology:

The methodology adopted for preparing this paper is based on qualitative explanation. There is the use of secondary sources like, books, magazine, newspaper, research papers, digital resources, archives etc. for the purpose of data and information collection.

Theoretical base of New Social Movements through various Approaches:

To understand any idea or concept, we need to be clear with its theoretical base at first. Number of approaches are linked with the theory of new social movements. Some such approaches and their impact upon new social movements are as follows-

- **New Social Movements and Gandhism:**

Gandhian principles of action basically include social harmony, non-violence, moral and ethical values of action and rejects Euro-Centric view of development, specifically Western science and technology. The impact of Gandhi on new social movements can be traced to many important initiatives and organizations around third world liberation, peace and non-violence, international solidarity, the environment and democracy.

- **Liberal Approach and New Social Movements:**

The liberal approach views the new social movements to be the part of the larger freedom project as those movements demands larger autonomy and liberty. According to liberal approach, most of the modern social movements are directed to claim for right and social goods. Democracy is a focal point of new social movements and they criticize the state due to its insufficiency and un-attentive nature to meet people's need. New social movements demand for better deliberation and democratic environment. Liberal approach said the

ineffectiveness in the democratic mechanism can be well settled with effective institutional structure and thus many of the modern movements are seemed to be reformative in nature.

- **Marxist Approach and New Social Movements:**

Marxism has also immense impact upon the new social movements. Marxism which said about the rights of the working class; its ideology was the main reason behind nineteenth century working class and capitalist employees' movement. In twentieth century, neo-Marxist theories have been developed that have opened themselves to adding questions to race, gender, environment and other issues to an analysis centered on political and economic conditions. Marxist approach have remained influential in understanding the role of political economy and class differences as key forces in many historical and current social movements and they continue to challenge approaches that are limited by their inability to imagine serious alternatives to consumer capitalist social structure.

- **Post-Modernism and New social Movements:**

Eighteenth century was the age of 'Enlightenment' by the time which more importance was given to the idea of 'modernity' and a rationalist scientific-technological outlook. But post-modernism denounces Enlightenment's claim to universality. Post-modernists like AshisNandy says enlightenment ideas represent the 'colonization of the mind'. Post-modernists reject the idea that the spread of rationality and scientific temper are emancipatory and instead argued for the preservation of local knowledge system. They view new social movements as an arena of new social identities against the fundamentals of enlightenment. For them, many new social movements attempt to break out from the colonization of mind and tried to make new emancipation.

These are some of the ideas that define new social movements from different lens.

Differentiating New Social Movements with earlier social movements:

Based upon the form, techniques, issues etc. the new social movements can be classified from earlier set of social movements. The basic difference between new and old social movements is regarding the way of their organization. The new social movements are seemed to be less hierarchical and more systematic in nature in comparison to the old social movements. The motive of new forms of social movements is social transformation rather than holding state power. Besides they are also called as anti-authoritarian in nature because they do not directly confront the state in the form of civil or harsh war which was a method applied by the older form of social movements.

The old social movements are mainly interested in material issues such as redistributing wealth and political issues such as access to political power etc., while new social movements are guided more by cultural issues. Almost every sections of people become a part of the new forms of social movements. The rise and involvement of the middle-class intelligentsia with the new forms of social movements gave them a distinct identity. Old social movements generally concerned with the rights of the working class of people or the deprived ones. But the new social movements are not only considering these earlier issues but also deviating the attention of the common masses towards newer issues related to basic civil rights, environment, security of

every form etc. Thus, these new social movements are said to be more inclusive in nature. Hence, we can say that the new social movements find some differences with earlier forms of social movements.

New Social Movements in India:

India witnessed number of social movements since time earlier. Be it the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 or the long movement for its independence, the people of India organized themselves for a greater public cause. With the passage of time, the priorities of the people are also changing. Now they have become more conscious regarding their rights, justice as well as the threats to their security. The new social movements in India highlighted issues related to environmental protection, the rights of the indigenous, rights over their resources etc. Hence, in relation to it, mass protests and rallies took place from time to time. The era of beginning of a new social movement in India can be traced back to the 1974 incident of Chipko movement. It was an environmental movement that took place in the Himalayan region of Uttarakhand where women hugged the trees so that they could not be cut down. This movement is considered to be the torchbearer of environmental movements in India. Following this the Narmada Bachao Andolan led by Medha Patkar, Baba Amte etc. took place that opposed the construction of big dams over the river Narmada. Same concerns are carried over by the ongoing tension in Assam regarding the construction of a big dam over the river Subansiri, as the people here feared that NE India being a region of high-seismic zone, falling down of the dams will flood the downstream areas of the state.

Besides environment, the rights and concern over the issues related to women are also gaining momentum. Earlier women's political rights and cultural rights are given importance. While now besides political and economic equality now various of women are highlighted. With the rise of crimes against women like harassment, domestic violence, abuse and rape etc., now people are openly protesting these issues. Making stringent laws after the nation-wide protest over the Nirbhaya case as well as organizing peoples' march all gave a new dimension to the way people protests. The recent #MeToo movement regarding sexual harassment of women at workplace or other sectors also shows how things and issues are changing. The right to freedom of religion is guaranteed to everyone under the Indian constitution. Accordingly, the Sabarimala temple entry issue also draws attention of many and made the government, the judiciary and the general public to think in depth the right to worship by women.

Above all, the new social movements in India are also gaining its momentum with the invalidation of Section 377 of IPC by the Supreme Court of India and made homosexuality legal in India. This judgement shows how the people and society in India are becoming more inclusive and wider in their viewpoints. This reflects that the rights are equally available to every section irrespective of his gender. Besides, the 2011 nation-wide Fight Against Corruption movement led by Anna Hazare in demand for a Jan Lokpal bill, India's continuous bid for fight against terrorism etc. all shows how more and more people are involving themselves in these social issues to meet their needs and aspirations. Thus, we can say that like other nations of the world, India is also experiencing a wave of newness in the form of new social movements.

Relevance of New Social Movements:

Many scholars often are reluctant to consider and differentiate the new social movements from the earlier social movements. For them, there are not a definite line so to identify the two. But if we look at the

changing nature of movements and the issues that they highlight, we can find out the differences. Earlier movements are basically meant for one's civil and political base, be it in the form of a civil war or a violent protest. But the new social movements remain peaceful at many times and they consider the greater public cause, which is not usually restricted to one singular person or one community. They are relevant if we need to consider the ongoing changes. Undoubtedly these new social movements will experience criticism from diverse sections as they might not entertain the views of many. But their importance cannot be ignored now a days as they provide the people to continue their fight to fulfill their aspirations.

References:

1. Das, Raju J. 2016: Social Movements and State repression in India in 'Journal of Asian and African Studies', SAGE Journals
2. Menon, Krishna & Subberwal, Ranjana 2019: Social Movements in Contemporary India, SAGE Publications Inc.
3. Melucci, Alberto. 1980, The New Social Movements: A Theoretical Approach, SAGE Journals, May 1, 1980
4. Pichardo, Nelson A. 1997, New Social Movements: A Critical Review in 'Annual Review of Sociology', August, 1997, Vol. 23, pp:411-430
5. Rai, Dr. Bina. 2015, New Social Movements in India: An Aspect of Environmental Movements in 'International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)', vol.4, Issue 9, Sept. 2015
6. Ray, Raka & Katzenstein, Mary Fainsod (Edited). 'Social Movements in India: Poverty, Power, Politics', Bowman & Littlefield Publishers. Inc.
7. Shah, Ghanshyam. 2011, (Review): 'Social Movement I: Issues of Identity by T K Oommen; Social Movements II: Concerns for Equality and Security by T K Oommen' in Economic and Political Weekly (EPW), May 2011, Vol. 46, No. 21, pp. 33-35
8. <https://m.economictimes.com/magazines/panache/2018-the-year-when-metoo-shook-india/2018-the-year-of-metoo-in-india/slideshow/66346583.cms>
9. <https://countercurrents.org/2020/01/the-anti-cao-nrc-movement-hope-and-prospects/>
10. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/a-brief-history-of-student-protests-in-india/story-zYvk2GebIUVBtzjOzcLA1N.html>