

# Theories of Social Movements

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*Abstract— Social movement is one of the important manifestation of collective behaviour .In the contemporary years the study of social movements has devoted the attraction of large number of sociologists not only in India but also in West. Every social movement whether new or old is launched for one or other reason .This paper reviewed the various theories which conceptualise the beginning of social movements .This paper also examined the historical and social context about the social movements .The researcher has used the secondary sources like- published books, journals ,internet ,etc. for data collection. The knowledge of literature on social movements can help the researchers to develop insights about new ideology, leadership, theoretical orientation and organisations of social movements.*

*Index Terms— Social movement, historical, ideology, insights, organisations ,orientation.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Social movements have broadly been perceived as 'organised' or 'collective effort' to bring about changes in the thought ,beliefs, values, attitudes ,relationships and major institutions in society or to resist any change in the above societal arrangements . Blumer (1951)[1] defined social movements as 'collective enterprises to establish a new social order in life'. According to Haberle (1972)[2] it is 'a collective attempt to bring about a change in certain social institutions or to create entirely a new order. Social movements can be understood in social and historical contexts as well .For example in North America, in the wake of the emerging threat from Fascist and the communist movements in the 1930s "social movements were conceptualised by scholars like Haberle in 1951 as the potentially dangerous form of non-institutionalised collective political behaviour which if left unattended, threatened the stability of the established ways of life". However social movements are not completely devastative but are creative as well. Many scholars such as Blumer have emphasised the rise of new norms of adaptive behaviour ,problem solving and learning orientation possibly present in social movements. Some sociologists in 1950s &1960s like Turner and Killian (1957 ) ,Parsons,(1969) Smelser and others viewed social movements from the perspective of collective behaviour. According to this perspective social movements are viewed as non-institutionalised collective actions , which are not led by current social norms ,formed to meet undefined or unstructured situations and are understood in terms of breakdown either in the organs of social control or normative integration ,due to structural changes .The resulting strains, discontent, frustration ,and aggression from this situation ultimately lead the individual to participate in non-institutionalised collective behaviour. Also this behaviour pattern has a 'life cycle', which moves from spontaneous crowd action to the formation of public and

social movement (Cohen, 1995:671-72, cf.Jamson and Eyreman, 1991:41)

Each society has its own insight on social movements which is developed based on its own socio-economic, cultural and intellectual tradition .For example sociologists in Europe formulated social movements in a somewhat different term, based on socio-political conditions and the intellectual heritage, from that of Americans. While in the US it is an empirically observable phenomenon, in Europe it has emerged to be theoretically connected object .The Marxian theoretical position was widely followed while Weberian position was widely used in the United States.

The established social and political order of Europe and America received a severe impact in late 1950s and 1960s with the violent outburst of Black Civil Rights , students, women's ,peace, gay and environment movements .The previously existing theoretical perspectives however , were unable to explain these movements which marked a sharp departure from the earlier organised movements of labour and working class. These departures were largely viewed in terms of the emergence of new social actors and categories due to the fundamental shift in social structure and the emergence of post- industrial society. Touraine (1981, 1983) observes these phenomena as 'new social movements being potential bearers of new social interests'. These theorists asserted that essential elements of social movements are ideology, mobilisation , organisation and leadership.

Social movements in the developing countries like India have conventionally been conceptualised either from the Marxian or from the Functionalist perspectives. However the proliferation of new social movements, manifestation of new form of collective actions, resurgence of violence in the new contexts and the articulation of new forms of collective actions in these societies have generated enormous interests among social scientists , policy planners and social activists for the study of social movements. However social movements in these societies can be analysed by following

the theoretical tools widely used in western societies.

## II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1. To study the origin of social movements .
2. To study the theoretical background of social movements.
3. To study the historical and social context of social movements.
4. To study the changes brought about by social movements.
5. To study the causes of social movements.

## III. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

1. Social movements develop the quality of leadership among the individuals .
2. Strong the social movements strong the social organisation .
3. Social movements develop new ideologies among the people of society.

## IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is the basis of every research. For the present research the researcher has used the explanatory research design and secondary sources like published books, journals, magazines and internet, etc. for data collection.

## V. ANALYSIS OF DATA

As already mentioned the research is about the theories of social movements. After reading and analyzing the various books, journals and magazines, it has been found there are various schools of thought/theories on the origin of social movements. These theories provide the knowledge about the causes of social movements and changes brought about in society due to social movements .The theories about the social movements can be mentioned below:

### a) The theory of mass society:

The main proponent of the theory is Kornhauser in (1959).[7] He viewed that people in the mass society are not integrated in the society due to the lack of an intermediate structure .This leads to alienation , tension and ultimately social protest. In the mass society individuals are related to one another not by variety of groups, etc., but by their relations to a common authority, i.e. the state .In the mass society , in the absence of independent groups and associations people lack the resource to word off the threat to their autonomy .In their absence people lack the resources to restrain their own behaviour to escape from these tensions .According to Kornhauser mass society is conditioned by elite domination over the mass. It replaces democratic rule .In this society individuals are objectively alienated .To Kornhauser "alienation hightens responsiveness to the appeal of mass movements because they provide the occasions for expressing resentment against what is, as well as promises of a totally different world .In short, people who are atomised

readily become mobilized".

### b) The theory of status inconsistency:

The proponents of this theory ,like Broom(1959)[4] and Lenski(1954), [3] are of the view that the objective discrepancy between person's ranking and status(e.g., education, income, occupation) generate subjective tensions in the society leading to cognitive dissonance, discontentment and protest .The state of severe status discrepancy, according to these scholars, leads to subjective tensions and dissonance.

### c) The theory of structural strain:

This theory is propounded by Smelser (1962) .This theory considers structural strain as the underlying factor contributing to collective behaviour .Structural strain may occur at different levels such as norms ,values, mobility, situational facilities ,etc .Because of these structural strains some generalised belief that seeks to provide an explanation for the strain, may emerge .Both strain and generalised belief require precipitating factors to trigger off a movement .Smelser's analysis of the genesis of social movements is very much within the structural- functional frame work .Smelser considers strain as something that endangers the relationship among the parts of the system leading to its malfunctioning .It places stress on the feeling of deprivation also.

### d) The theory of relative deprivation :

This theory has been given a place of prominence in the social movements."Relative deprivation" is a concept developed by Stouffer (1949)[5] It holds that one ' feels' deprived according to the gap between expectations and realisations .In Marxian analysis economic deprivation has been identified to be the prime cause of social conflict among the two antagonistic classes i.e. the 'haves' and 'have nots.' .

### e) The theory of cultural revitalisation :

As propagated by Wallace(1956)[6] expresses the view that social movements are manifested out a deliberate, organised and conscious action of the member of the society to construct a more satisfying culture for themselves .To him , the revitalisation movements undergo four phases of progression :from cultural stability, to increased individual stress to cultural distortion and disillusionment, to cultural revitalisation.

## VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of the results show that social movements emerge as a result of collective behaviour against established social, economic and political orders. In America scholars like Haberle in 1951 conceptualised social movements as dangerous form of non-institutionalised collective behaviour which if left unattended , is dangerous for the stability of the

established ways of life. Blumer (1951) [8] highlighted the rise of new norms of adaptive behaviour, problem solving and learning orientation potentially present in the social movements. Kornhauser (1959) [9] in mass society theory viewed that due to lack of intermediate structure people in the mass society are not integrated in the society. Harkheimer and Adorno in their "Dialectic of Enlightenment" in (1947) [12] write about the scientism of the enlightenment principles. The enlightenment thought logically proceeded from the principles of dominating nature to becoming a tool of dominations of human beings. The totalizing principles of universal truth of science logically create a society without differences but of similarities, i.e., a mass society. The techno-rational governed administered society in mass society. Smelser (1962) [10] in structural strain theory viewed that the more severe the strain, the more likelihood of social movements. R.K. Merton in his strain theory (1939) states that society puts pressure on individuals to achieve socially accepted goals, though they lack the means. This leads to strain which may lead individuals to commit crimes, like selling drugs or becoming involved in prostitution as a means to gain financial security. Also relative deprivation (concept given by Stouffer) theory holds that one feels deprived according to the gap between expectations and realisations. According to Karl Marx economic deprivation is the main cause of social conflict among the opposing classes in society. To Aberle (1966) [11] deprivation has also non-material base e.g. status, behaviour, worth etc. Relative deprivation i.e., the discrepancy between legitimate expectations and the reality is main point of social movements. Gurr (1970) has perceived deprivation as a gap between expectations and perceived capabilities involving generalised sets of values: economic conditions, political power and social status. Wallace who analysed revitalisation theory has mentioned about four phases: "period of cultural stability, period of increased individual stress, period of cultural distortion and consequent disillusionment and period of revitalisation." Peter Worsley in 1968 also developed and adapted Wallace's insights. Lastly according to status inconsistency theory the objective disparity between person's ranking and status generate subjective tensions in the society leading to cognitive dissonance, discontent and protest

## VII. CONCLUSION

From the above study it can be concluded that social movements are 'organised' or 'collective effort' to bring about changes in the thought, beliefs, values, attitudes, relationships and social institutions or to resist any change in above societal arrangement. The essential elements of the social movements are ideology, collective mobilisation, organisation and leadership. There are several schools of thought on the origin of social movements. These schools of thought are theory of mass society, theory of status

inconsistency, structural strain theory, theory of relative deprivation and theory of cultural revitalization. Each school of thought has respective views on social movements. Mass society theory views social movements arise due to the lack of intermediate structure in the society. Status inconsistency theory views due to the difference between person's ranking and status, society under goes discontent and protest. The theory of structural strain asserts that severe structural strain can help manifest social movements. The strains lead to psychological disturbances in the society that ultimately result in social protests. The theory of relative deprivation views that gap between expectations and realizations may be the primary cause of social movements in the society. Lastly the theory of cultural revitalisation views that social movements are manifested out of a deliberate, organised and conscious action of member of society to construct a more satisfying culture for themselves. Thus social movements are important for social change.

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