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Topic: - Social Movements

Introduction

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. 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.

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. 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. 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.

Features of Social Movements: -

1. 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.
2. Social movements lead to the creation of an entirely new social, economic, and political order.
3. 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.
4. It is obvious that the social movements involve collective action rather than individual action.
5. Social movements may be organized or unorganized.
6. Social movements may be peaceful in nature or they may also turn violent.
7. The aim of a social movement is to bring about or resist social change in the society.
8. 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.

How Social Movements Originate: -

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. Social Deprivation

When people get deprived of things deemed valuable in the society—whether money, justice, status, or privileges—they tend to 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 fervour.

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.

1. 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 and the movement of people from East Germany to West Germany are some examples of migratory social movements.

2. 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. Sarvodaya Movement is an example of a Utopian Movement

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. 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.

Conclusion

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.