

**MASTER OF ARTS  
SOCIOLOGY  
CENTRE FOR OPEN AND  
DISTANCE LEARNING  
(CODL)**



**MSO 301: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN  
INDIA  
BLOCK II**

**CENTRE FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING  
TEZPUR UNIVERSITY (A CENTRAL UNIVERSITY)  
TEZPUR, ASSAM - 784028  
INDIA**

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# **MSO 301: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA**



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**TEZPUR, ASSAM-784028**

**INDIA**

## **MSO-301: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA**

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# BLOCK II

## MODULE III: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

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### UNIT 7: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA: DALIT MOVEMENT

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### UNIT 9: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA: LABOUR AND TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

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### **BLOCK INTRODUCTION**

This Block comprises of Modules **III** and **IV** of MSO 301: Social Movements in India. **Module III** focuses on social movements specifically in the context of India. The learners will get an insight into the Peasant Movement in India in **Unit 6**. **Unit 7** will help the learners to understand Dalit Movement in India. **Unit 8** explores the Tribal Movement. **Unit 9**, on the other hand, discusses the Labour and Trade Union Movement. **Unit 10** deals with Nationality and Sub-Nationality Movements in India.

**Module IV** is dedicated to the new social movements in India. The learners will be able to learn why these movements are labelled as ‘new’. **Unit 11** explores Women’s Movement in India while **Unit 12** analyses the Environmental Movements. **Unit 13** deals with Middle Class Movements in India. On the other hand, Ethnic Movements in India are covered in **Unit 14**.

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## **MODULE III: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA**

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## **UNIT 6: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA: PEASANT MOVEMENT**

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Objectives

6.3 Classification of Peasant Societies in India

6.4 Peasantry in Social Anthropology and Peasant Studies in India

6.5 Indian Peasantry: A Glimpse of Pre-Colonial and Colonial Period

6.6 Agrarian Struggle and Peasant Movements in Colonial India

6.7 Agrarian Struggles and Peasant Movements in Post-colonial India

6.8 Summing Up

6.9 Questions

6.10 Recommended Readings and References

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### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this Unit, we will learn about the peasant community of India, its relation to the agrarian economy and also the different peasant struggles both in colonial and post-colonial India. To enlighten on these aspects, it is also necessary to understand the background of peasant studies in India, which we will look at towards the latter part of this unit. To start with, let us look at how different scholars have looked into peasants and the idea of the peasantry.

According to Kathleen Gough, peasants are “people who engage in agriculture or related production with primitive means and who surrender

part of their produce to landlords or to agents of state”. From this definition, the position of the peasants is obvious that they are passive to landlords. As distinct from the isolated ‘primitive communities’ of tribal society, peasant communities were defined as ‘part societies with part cultures’ (Kroeber, 1948). In the localised vocabulary, peasants are denoted by different terms like *kisan*, *krishak*, *roytu*, *chashi* etc. A peasant society can also be described in terms of a small-scale social organisation in which peasants pre-dominate the features/ natures unique to its own and also from other social groups/categories. The primary socio-environmental habitat of the peasants is the agrarian society. Teodor Shanin, a British sociologist who is well-known for his studies on peasant societies, has defined peasantry as having four essential and mutually dependent facets:

- i) The family farm as the basic multi-functional unit of social organisation
- ii) Land husbandry and usually animal rearing as the main means of livelihood
- iii) A specific traditional culture closely linked with the way of life of small rural communities and multi-directional subjection to powerful outsiders.

According to Redfield, peasants are small producers for self-consumption. They have had paradoxical social identities historically. They have been often represented as reactionary, conservative, homologous, self-sufficient etc. They have always borne the brunt of extreme forms of subordination and oppression in Indian society. They represent a vast body of the socially deprived sections like the STs, SCs, OBCs and the economically marginalised namely landless agricultural labourers, sharecroppers, tenants, poor artisans and small and marginal cultivators.

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## 6.2 OBJECTIVES

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By the end of this Unit, you will able to:

- Analyse the classification of peasant societies in India.

- Discuss the background of how peasantry found a place in social anthropology.
- Analyse the peasantry and peasant movements both in colonial and post-colonial India.

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### 6.3 CLASSIFICATION OF PEASANT SOCIETIES IN INDIA

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Here, some of the classifications of peasant society have been explained. Beteille (1987) focuses on three closely related ideas on the Indian peasantry:

- (a) Its attachment to land either as owner, tenant, sharecropper or labourer.
- (b) Occupies a low position both in the economic and political grounds.
- (c) Their oppression and exploitation have severe political dimensions.

Daniel Thorner, a pioneer in agrarian studies of India has taken land ownership as the central criteria for classification. His categorisation represents a Marxian model of agrarian classes as it is based on the relations of production or is in relation to the means of production. The other important criteria are- (a) Type of income obtained from the soil (b) The nature of rights (c) The extent of fieldwork actually performed. Accordingly, he provides the classification as having three different categories:

- i) *Maliks*:- Their income is primarily derived from property rights in the soil. Their common interest is to keep the level of rents up while keeping the wage-level down. They collect rents from tenants, sub-tenants and share-croppers.
- ii) *Kisan*:- They are the working peasants who have property interests in the land. But they have actual rights, whether legal or customary, inferior to those of the *maliks*. They include small landowners (who self-cultivate their land with their family without employing any outside labour) and substantial tenants



(those who hold leases under the big landlords or rich landowners).

- iii) *Mazdoor*:- They earn their livelihood primarily from working on others' land/plots. They can be poor tenants (having tenancy rights but less secure as their holdings are too small to suffice for a family's maintenance and the income derived from the land often less than that earned by wage labour), sharecroppers (cultivating the land for others on share-cropper basis and having at least agricultural implements) and landless labourers.

Based on the size of land holdings, peasants can also be classified as rich peasants who own more than 15 acres of land, small peasants who own land between 2.5 to 5 acres of land, marginal farmers who own land less than 2.5 acres as well as landless farmers who work as manual labourers on others' land to earn a livelihood.

There are 5 types of peasant groups according to K.L Sharma based on resource ownership. They are:

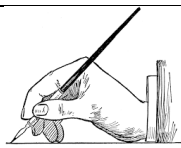
- i) Owner-cultivator.
- ii) Largely owner-cultivator.
- iii) Largely tenant-cultivator.
- iv) Tenant-cultivator.
- v) Totally poor peasant.

#### **Stop and Read**

Tenants (or tenant farmers) are those farmers who reside on land owned by a landlord. They contribute their labour towards farming on the landlord's piece of land. They make payments to the owner either in cash or kind (which is a fixed portion of the produce). There is a concept called *tenancy at will* which means that tenants can be evicted purely based on a whim.

Here comes in the related concept of sharecropping. Sharecropping is a form of farming where a tenant is allowed by a landowner to use his land to work in return for a major share of the farm produce.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What are the different criteria used by Daniel Thorner to classify peasantry in India?

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2. What are the three closely related ideas to Indian peasantry according to Andre Beteille?

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### 6.4 PEASANTRY IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND PEASANT STUDIES IN INDIA

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The Indian village in the colonial discourse consisted of the ideas of self-sufficiency, communal ownership of land, and functional integration of diverse occupational groups. But the field-based village studies carried out by social anthropologists during the 1950s-60s in the backdrop of nation-building process that was going on in the post-independence period, were a direct consequence of the newly emerged interest in the study of the peasantry in Western academia. The peasantry had played a crucial role in the freedom struggles of the newly independent nations. Thus the primary

agenda for these new political regimes was the transformation of the backward and stagnant economies. With the twin objectives of development and modernisation, the Western powers paved the way for the advent of development studies which prioritised the understanding of the structures of the agrarian relations in the Third World countries. Since a large majority of the population in Third World societies were directly dependent on agriculture, understanding the existing patterns/structures of agrarian relations and formulation of ways of their transformation emerged as important priorities within development studies. Funding for the study of peasant economies and societies took shape because of the Western political interest in the rural inhabitants of the Third World as well as the growing influence of modernisation and development theories. The study of agrarian relations did not occupy a central position in Indian sociology, unlike those of caste, kinship, village community or gender. It was only with the publication of Andre Beteille's *Studies in Agrarian Social Structure* (1974) that agrarian sociology received attention within the two disciplines.

#### **Stop and Read**

Western sociology has primarily remained focused on the study of urban-industrial societies since the days of the inception of the classical tradition. Be it Marx's study of industrial Europe or Weber's study of modern bureaucracy, the dominant approach of the Western tradition was the urban milieu. In fact, Teodor Shanin had rightly pointed out that the Western capitalist world claimed itself to be 'a world without peasants'.

However, in the peripheral Eastern and Central Europe (outside the mainstream Western tradition of social sciences), the agrarian question was crucial as we all know that Europe was ideologically

separated between that of USA and USSR since the Cold War days, where Western Europe fell within the purview of Western Block (USA) and Eastern Europe within that of Eastern Block (USSR).

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### **6.5 INDIAN PEASANTRY: A GLIMPSE OF PRE-COLONIAL AND COLONIAL PERIOD**

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A brief glimpse into the pre-colonial and colonial past is necessary in order to comprehend the present state of acute crisis in Indian agriculture and the life of the agrarian people. On the eve of the British conquest of India, the rural society was composed of a multitude of villages, each living an almost independent, atomistic and self-sufficient socio-economic existence. Private ownership of land had not been a prominent feature of traditional agrarian India. Rather, there was a system of collective ownership. Apart from the actual tillers of the soil, there were craftsmen and others in the village communities. Hence, it is apparent that land in pre-British India was not a commodity.

However, India was in the process of being conquered and transformed into a colonial state within the British social formation. As the colonial regime initiated the daunting task of reorganising local society in a framework that would pave the way for easy administration, the question of new proprietary rights over land became important to address. The most significant of such a change was the introduction of the Permanent Settlement Act 1793 by which the intermediary zamindars were granted ownership rights over land from which they previously had only the right to collect revenue. Scott refers to a concept called the 'moral economy of the peasantry' which he believed was disintegrating as the traditional structure of patron-client relations between zamindar and local peasants were weakening due to the additional colonial economic burden.

With the British conquest, in place of production for consumption, the economy started producing for profit and the market. The influx of cheap foreign goods destroyed the stability of agriculture and artisan industry while the entire social system and the rural power structure were gravely diluted by the administrative laws of the centralised British colonial state. The two changes—land becoming a commodity and shift of the agrarian economy from production for consumption to production for the market—can be clubbed under the idea of commercialisation of agriculture in colonial India. Famines were another major cause of discontent among the Indian peasantry in colonial India. They were caused due to a shift in cropping patterns through forced commercialisation of agriculture, which disintegrated the traditional systems of food security.

#### **Stop and Read**

The Asiatic Mode of Production is a theory devised by Karl Marx in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It refers to a form of production that Marx understood as peculiar to Asia, especially India. He believed that such a type of production mode has an absence of private ownership of land, autonomous village communities, and a despotic centralized state in charge of public works like irrigation. A related term is an oriental despotism, a phrase that Marx used for a kind of totalitarianism unique to Non-Western nations. In an article in an 1853 edition of *The New York Tribune*, Marx said that an oppressive centralizing power force existed beyond the West where civilization was in a political sense underdeveloped and there was a need to organize vast waterworks over a vast territory encompassing many isolated communities.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What were the features of the Permanent Settlement 1793?

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2. Elaborate on the idea of land becoming a commodity.

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3. What do you understand by “moral economy” of peasants?

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### 6.6 AGRARIAN STRUGGLE AND PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN COLONIAL INDIA

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Here you shall learn about some of the most important peasant movements of colonial India. These movements were marked by violent protests against the existing colonial policies as well as the role of the intermediaries. With increased alienation from their own land and resources, the peasants in different parts of the country participated in rebellions and upsurges. A few of them have been discussed below:

(1) *Santhal Insurrection (1855-56)*: It is considered to be the first peasant movement in India. The Santhals are a group of tribals largely concentrated in Bihar. They are mainly agriculturalists. The main cause behind the insurrection was the snatching away of their land by the Britishers, land that they had cultivated for centuries. This was done primarily due to the

structural change brought about by the Permanent Settlement Act, 1793. The scenario was such that the land that belonged to the Santhals traditionally was heavily taxed upon. The peasants had to lose their ownership over it owing to failure in revenue payment. They could only work on the land that no longer belonged to them. This led to land alienation. This was unbearable for the Santhals and they took to insurrection. This insurrection was highly violent and revolutionary in nature and organisation.

(2) *Indigo Revolt (1859-60)*: In Bengal, the indigo planters exploited the local peasants by forcing them to grow indigo on their lands instead of crops like rice. They threatened the peasants through kidnappings, attacks on women and children, seizure of cattle, burning and demolition of houses as well as the destruction of crops. Suppressed under such atrocities, the peasants burst out in protest in 1859 led by Digambar Biswas and Bishnu Biswas of Nadia district. They decided not to grow indigo and resisted the physical pressure of the planters and their *Lathiyals*. A counterforce was also organised by them against the attacks of the planters. Gradually they learned the use of legal machinery and initiated immediate action. As result, the Government appointed an indigo commission to inquire into the problem of indigo cultivation and based on its recommendations, the Government issued a notification in November 1860 that the *riots* could not be compelled to grow indigo. Indigo cultivation was virtually wiped out from Bengal by the end of 1860.

(3) *Deccan Riots (1875)*: The root cause behind the riots in Deccan was the heavy taxation that the riots here suffered from. This happened, of course under the ryotwari system. Finding themselves trapped under the vicious circle of moneylenders who acted as exploiters, the riots needed a way to end this oppression. The prevailing condition became worse with the crash in cotton prices immediately after the civil war in America in 1864. the Government's decision to raise the land revenue by 50% in 1867 as well as the continuous situation of bad harvests. The year 1874 saw the rise of a

social boycott system initiated by the riots against the “outsider” moneylenders, as the latter were mostly Marwaris or Gujaratis. Such a protest took the forms like refusing to work in the owner’s field, refusal in the part of communities like the barbers, washermen to serve them. What started as a social boycott soon took the shape of agrarian riots. These riots finally led to the repressing of this movement by the Government and subsequently, the Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act was passed in 1879.

(4) *The Moplah Rebellion( 1836-1921)*: The Moplah Rebellion is also known as the Moplah Riots of 1921. It was the culmination of a series of riots by Moplahs in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries against the British and the Hindu landlords in Malabar. The Moplahs are the section of the people from the Muslim community in Kerala. Muslims had arrived in Kerala in the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD as traders via the Arabian Sea who were given permission to carry on trade by the native rulers. As many of them engaged in matrimony with the local people, their descendants came to be called Moplahs (son-in-law in Malayalam). The jenmis or the landlord held the land which was let out to others for farming in the traditional land system of Malabar even before the advent of Tipu Sultan. They were upper caste Hindus on whose land the Moplahs were mostly engaged in cultivation activity.

After the death of Tipu Sultan in 1799 in the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War, Malabar came under British authority as part of Madras Presidency. The Moplahs received land ownership rights under Sultan and most of the upper caste Hindus fled Malabar, losing ownership rights. However, the situation saw a drastic change with the coming of the British— they set out to restore ownership rights to the Jenmis who had earlier fled the region and were now given absolute ownership rights of the land (which was not the case previously). This saw a severe repercussion on the condition of the Moplah peasants—they faced high rents and a lack of security of tenure. This led to a series of riots by the Moplahs starting from 1836 which went on to 1921, slowly and steadily taking a communal form with the influence



of the Khilafat Movement of 1919. The rebellion was staunchly and severely crushed by the British.

### **Stop and Read**

#### **Phulaguri Uprising**

The Phulaguri uprising took place in the year 1861. Phulaguri is located in the present Nagaon district of Assam. It was the first ever peasant movement in the context of the Indian freedom movement. It took place much before the Champaran movement. It was also the first ever non-cooperation movement of Indian freedom movement because the farmers of Phulaguri region had stopped payment of taxes to the British administration, thus openly defied the colonisers.

The exorbitant tax imposed by the British administration on the farmers of Assam was the immediate cause of the Phulaguri uprising of 1861 AD. The British administration always acted in the interests of the British tea planters. As they had been suffering from a dearth of labourers, they had to bring labourers from other states at high costs. So the tea planters thought that it would be better to engage the local people as labourers. But the Assamese farmers could not be swayed by them. Therefore, the plantation owners decided to pauperise the local farmers of Assam by increasing the incidence of taxes so that they take up employment in the tea estates, along with doubling the tax collection. This time they imposed taxes even on the forest products made from bamboo, cane, wood etc. Moreover, the income tax was introduced for the first time. Simultaneously, the

poppy cultivation was also banned by the British in order to take up the trading in opium themselves.

Eventually, the people decided to register their protest and dissatisfaction. They handed over a petition asking for relief to the people from the exorbitant taxes. But Herbert rejected this polite and humble petition too. This left the people with the choice of embarking on non-cooperation. They decided not to pay any tax to the British administration any more. Thus the first ever non-cooperation movement in the annals of India's freedom movement was launched. The people organised a five-day convention called Raj Mel or assembly of people. The uprising was suppressed ruthlessly. But it left an indelible mark in the history of Assam.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Describe the nature of the Moplah rebellion.

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2. Why do you think the Phulaguri Uprising is a historic event in the history of India's freedom struggle?

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## **6.7 AGRARIAN STRUGGLES AND PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN POST- COLONIAL INDIA**

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The post-independence phase saw an uninterrupted continuation of the agrarian movements due to the failure of the ruling party to resolve any of the basic problems of the rural masses. In this period, the peasant struggles were led primarily by the left political parties like the Communist Party of India (CPI), the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) and the Socialist Party (SP) through their Kisan organisations.

By this phase, the failure of governmental measures in addressing the agrarian crisis came to be distinctly recognised. The agrarian crisis came to be intensified with the land reforms and community programmes meant for promoting capitalist farming in India; its agrarian policy has only aggravated their miseries. This has led to a series of peasant struggles in different parts of the country. Here we shall discuss two such major struggles of post-independence period.

We shall begin with the Telangana Rebellion (1947-51). This movement was launched in Telangana of the state of Andhra Pradesh against the former Nizam of Hyderabad. Telangana then was a region marked by the feudal economy. To see the background, we can find that the Reddies and Kammas were the prominent castes in Telangana. They traditionally worked as traders and moneylenders who exercised significant influence in the countryside. Thus, they wanted to undermine the dominance of Brahmins as agriculturists in the state. The growing land alienation had left many actual occupants or cultivators reduced to tenants-at-will, sharecroppers or landless labourers. Engineered by CPI, this armed peasant struggle did not outburst overnight but rather was a culmination of over three decades. The objectives of this armed struggle were:

- (a) land grabbing and redistribution,
- (b) the abolition of compulsory levy to the government, and
- (c) stopping the eviction of tenants under any cause.

The struggle turned violent. There was police retaliation against the Gram Raj Committees that were set up by the peasant groups to work as defence squads and institutions for self-governance. Later, the A.P. (Telangana Area) Tenancy and Agricultural Lands Act, 1950, was passed.

The next movement is the Naxalbari Peasant Struggle of 1967. It is a violent peasant agitation launched in March-April 1967 in a place called Naxalbari, in Darjeeling district of West Bengal. The Naxalite leaders like Charu Majumdar, Kanu Sanyal, Punjab Rao, Kumar Kishan, Jail Singh, Vinod Mitra and others had played a key role in this armed rebellion. Different causes of the agitation ranged from economic dissatisfaction, demand for reasonable distribution of benami lands, nationalisation of forests to exploitation by the moneylenders. The movement was aimed at the total annihilation of the big farmers, landlords and Jagirdars.

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## 6.8 SUMMING UP

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- Peasants are “people who engage in agriculture or related production with primitive means and who surrender part of their produce to landlords or to agents of state”. From this definition, the position of the peasants is obvious that they are passive to landlords. As distinct from the isolated ‘primitive communities’ of tribal society, peasant communities were defined as ‘part societies with part cultures’.
- Peasants can be categorised under different criteria like land and resource ownership as well as the size of land holdings.
- The peasantry had played a crucial role in the struggle for freedom in the newly independent nations. Thus the primary agenda for these new political regimes was the transformation of the backward and stagnant economies. With the twin objectives of development and modernisation, the Western powers paved the way for the advent of development studies which prioritised the understanding

of the structures of the agrarian relations in the Third World countries.

- The two changes—land becoming a commodity and shift of the agrarian economy from production for consumption to production for the market—can be clubbed under the idea of commercialisation of agriculture in colonial India.
- Some of the prominent peasant struggles of colonial India are Santhal Rebellion, Indigo Revolt, Deccan Riots and Moplah Rebellion.
- The post-independence phase saw an uninterrupted continuation of the agrarian movements due to the failure of the ruling party to resolve any of the basic problems of the rural masses. In this period, the peasant struggles were led primarily by the left political parties like the Communist Party of India (CPI), the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) and the Socialist Party (SP) through their Kisan organisations.

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## 6.9 QUESTIONS

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1. Describe the peasantry as a social community.
2. Discuss the nature of agrarian economy in pre-colonial India. Explain the idea of commercialisation of agriculture in colonial India.
3. Why do you think peasant studies arrived in India after independence?
4. How is the Asiatic Mode of Production characterised by Western understanding?
5. What are the commonalities among the peasant movements of colonial and post-colonial India?

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## **UNIT 7: DALIT MOVEMENT**

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Objectives

7.3 Dalits and the Caste System in India

7.4 Dalit Movement in India

7.4.1 Dalit Movement and Socio-Religious Reform in Pre-  
Independence India

7.4.2 Jyotirao Phule and Caste Reforms

7.4.3 B.R Ambedkar and Dalit movement

7.4.4 Post- Independence, Role of Political Parties and Dalit  
Feminism

7.5 Summing up

7.6 Questions

7.7 Recommended Readings and References

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### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

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Dalit movement in India has been one against oppression, injustice, and inequality of the highest order. It involves all institutionalized mobilisation by leaders and representatives of the community who have fought and still continues to do against casteism and untouchability that exists due to the caste system. This also includes issues of reservation in public and political offices, access to welfare schemes etc.

According to Guru (1993), the sociological study on Dalit movement in India has been largely influenced within the frame of “social mobility”,

“reference group” and “relative deprivation” references. Further, this mobility has been understood in the context of conversion (to other religions) and Sanskritisation. Guru views this ‘liberal’ perspective of scholars like M.S.A Rao, who believe Dalit protest and backward class assertions to be the inevitable and necessary reaction towards the prejudices based on “obscurantists Hindu traditions”. This approach assumes that such movement is restricted to achieving the limited progress in the existing socio-economic, civic and political structure, without incorporating the need for a radical transformation of the entire structure. These studies tend to suggest that certain Dalit groups or individuals try to adopt and imitate either ritually or culturally higher groups or individuals to achieve a similar social position or to adopt the values that promote the aspirations of an atomised individual with reference to those westernised middle-class Dalits in a civil society. These Sankritising movements, however, have been resisted by the ‘superior’ groups leading to violence as is famously seen in the case of Ambedkar’s Chowdar Tank Movement in 1927 and Srinivas’ study on Rampura (1987). Guru (1993) thus opines that the popular way of understanding Dalit social movement through the lens of relative deprivation is problematic as it does not allow for emancipatory consciousness of the group by restricting their conception of thoughts and ideas “in the terms of those privileged sections whose hegemonic worldview underlies the structures of domination”.

#### Stop and Read

- **Relative Deprivation:** The term is used to describe a condition of not having something typically social, economic and political resources. Unlike absolute deprivation, relative deprivation refers to a form of deprivation experienced when individuals or groups compare themselves with others who have. It is thus defined in subjective terms. The concept was first introduced



by Samuel Stouffer and others in 1949 in the psychological study *The American Soldier*.

- Reference group: The term reference group was coined by Herbert Hyman (1942) to apply to a group against which an individual or group evaluate their own situation or conduct. Newcomb (1943) used it to explain the changing values and attitudes of groups. It was Merton and Kitt (1950) who pointed out that relative deprivation is a special case of reference group behaviour.
- Sanskritisation: It refers to a process by which 'low' Hindu caste groups or tribal groups changes their customs, rituals and lifestyles as a means to uplift their status or to claim a higher position in the caste hierarchy (Srinivas, 1966). According to Srinivas (1966) who popularised the term, the change is in the direction of the status of the locally dominant caste.

Dalit mobilisation has also been studied on the basis of its ideological paradigms. Gail Omvedt (1994) who has offered a comparative explanation on Dalit identity assertions examines the Gandhian, Ambedkarite and Marxist paradigms by focusing on Maharashtra which gave rise to Ambedkarism, Karnataka where Gandhian influence on Dalits was most extensive and Dalits and Andhra where the mobilisation rose under the influence of Leftist ideologies. According to Omvedt the differences in degrees of industrialisation and commercialisation of agriculture, and the response to colonial structures in these three places led to the organisation of the Dalits along separate lines.

Thus, in order to understand the Dalit movement, one needs to look at the historical as well as social context on which it has arisen. The following

sections will thus look into the meaning of Dalit identity, the caste system and the problem of untouchability, the role of Dalit leaders and the state.

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## 7.2 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit, we will try to understand the term Dalit and revisit the caste system, and the issue of untouchability. The unit will look at the historical processes that led to the emergence of anti-caste movements and reforms before independence and Dalit mobilisation in India post-independence.

By the end of this Unit, you are expected to:

- Explain the issues of Dalit identity assertions and its history;
- Discuss the factors responsible for the rise of the Dalit movement in India;
- Explain the contributions of Jyotirao Phule and B. R. Ambedkar in shaping the movement.

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## 7.3 DALITS AND THE CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA

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The Dalits or the Ex-Untouchables have been defined through various terms- Panchama, Outcasts, Atisudra, Avarna etc. (Shah,2001). The term 'Dalit', however, is of Marathi origin and literally means 'ground' or 'broken to pieces'. It was proposed as an alternative to the term *Harijan* which was proposed by Mahatma Gandhi to the members of the community. However, Ambedkar and his followers did not accept it stating the lack of change in their social status despite the usage. In the 1960s and 70s, the term gained a political meaning with the rise of the *Dalit Panthers* movement. The term now is seen as an expression of a socio-political identity born out of struggles of the past oppression faced by them and as a symbol of change and revolution. The Constitution of India recognises Dalits under the category of 'Schedule Caste' and have committed to the goal of equality, liberty and justice by abolishing untouchability. According to Census 2011, Dalits, or Schedule Castes, comprise 16.6% (201 million) of India's population, up from 16.2% in 2001. Despite this, crimes against Dalits have increased with National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)-2016

stating that the rate of crimes committed against Dalits from 2011 to 2016, has registered a six to eight-fold increase in the compared to the crime rate in the preceding five years (2007-2011) with a majority of it being murder, assault and rape.

Untouchability remains one of the disturbing features of the caste system. It is a wide known fact that traditional Hindu society is based on the *varna* and caste/jati system. The *varna* model consists of four categories – *Brahmins*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya*, and *Shudra*, each representing a social class. The first three is considered to be twice-born, i.e., the men of belonging to the caste of these *varnas* go through the initiation rite of sacred thread wearing ceremony, i.e. the Vedic rite of Upanayana, which the Sudras were not allowed to perform. Citing Ghurye, Srinivas (1962) explains that the term *varna* was used only as a distinction between the Arya and the Dasa initially in the Rig- Veda. Later, the first three classes of the ‘twice-born’ of society are very frequently mentioned, It is only in one of the later hymns, the *Purushasukta*, that a reference is made to four orders of society as originating from the sacrifice of the Primeval Being, *Purusha*, from whom each of the group received their qualities, *guna*, and the names of the four orders are thus given – “the Brahmin emerged from his mouth, the Kshatriyas from his arms, the Vaishyas from his thighs and the Shudras from the feet”.

These four *varnas* have been mentioned in the sacred texts were thus accordingly assigned their duties, *varnadharma*, with the Brahmins was engaged in the ritual processes as priests, the Kshatriyas as warrior-rulers, the Vaishyas as herdsmen-agriculturalists who looked after economic exchange of goods and service and management of livestock, and the Shudra, the servants who worked in the field and rendered services (Kolenda,1985). Each *varna* thus has a quality encoded into their physical body that determines their *dharma*. Omvedt (1995) also

connects the institution of caste to the ideology of *karma* and *dharma* of larger Hindu social order and reality. Through this, people's actions and their conditions are justified by the logic of rebirth where the status of the present birth are fruits of the actions of their past lives and acceptance of the conditions, no matter how terrible, is a way of redeeming and enhancing their status in the next. According to Omvedt, this belief has resulted in the establishment of Brahminical hegemony that perpetuates a system of graded inequality that is rooted in a person's birth, over caste system for thousands of years as well as the exploitation of non-Brahmins especially the Dalits.

Caste has been defined in various ways. Risley(1891) defined caste as a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name; claiming common descent from a mythical ancestor- human or divine and professing to follow the same hereditary occupation. Bougle (1968) attributed caste with three specific characteristics- hierarchy, hereditary occupation and separation of a group on the basis of purity and pollution. According to Beteille (1965) caste is a small and named group of persons characterized by endogamy, hereditary membership, and a specific style of life which sometimes includes the pursuit by the tradition of a particular occupation and is usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system.

Ghurye (1950) gave a more extensive definition of caste by incorporating six traditional features. According to him, the caste system is characterised by segmental division of society into different groups, which are hierarchically organised. These groups are endogamous in nature, i.e. restrictions in the selection of mate outside the group are the norm and follow hereditary occupation. Finally, caste groups also follow rules on commensality with restrictions on feeding and there exist privileges and disadvantageous associated with each group. It thus follows that

membership is fixed for life because the individual cannot alter their caste associations.

However, it also a well-established notion that varna and caste(*jati*) are two different things. Srinivas (1962) argued that while the features of the caste system are implicit in the varna scheme, the two in fact function in different manners. The varna scheme at best is only a broad categorization of the Hindu society. It is the caste or jati groups that truly are effective mechanisms of divisions that exist. One major point here is the exclusion of the ex-Untouchables or Dalits from the four-fold scheme. The Dalits are excluded from this chaturvarna system, considered impure and are therefore also called the Avarna. Dumont (1980) in his study pointed out that the caste system rests on the principle of hierarchy, and the duality of the pure versus the impure is the dominant ideological facet of this system. The distinction between the pure and impure translated to individual and groups as well. By extension, features of caste system such as endogamy, caste commensality and feeding, were all expressions of this duality. By far the most explicit expression was in the nature of the occupation. Thus, those who were engaged in traditionally 'unclean' occupation such as scavenging, disposing of dead bodies, cleaning sewage, sweeping, tanning etc was considered to be polluted and was relegated to the status of an 'untouchable'. The 'Varna' model thus only provide a general framework within which the innumerable variations of caste throughout India are found. Even then, as Srinivas' work has demonstrated, the nature of hierarchy for the caste group differs from region to region with economic, political factors producing unique local hierarchies.

The understanding of the caste system which controls and regulates social, economic, political and religious life in India is absolutely essential while interpreting the Indian reality of the exploited. Dalits were excluded from the mainstream, marginalised and continuously persecuted at the hands of the upper caste. The degraded status of Dalits adds to other social problems

of poverty, bonded labour, unemployment etc. The Dalit identity assertions are the result of the constant anger being generated from centuries of exploitation through barbaric activities of the upper castes of India. Bharti (2017), in this regard, looks at the formation of modern Dalit consciousness in the broader framework of the movement which is rooted in the values of human dignity and self-respect. According to Bharti, conceptual values like justice, equality and dignity of human beings are integral features of the Dalit schema for individuals to associate, in order to form a political society which enables a life of freedom and dignity to the people inhabiting the same. The idea of a Dalit self, then, has basically come to its present form through the invocation of an agency rooted in historical suffering and social exclusion. For Dalits, therefore, the identity reflects a concern for self- image and self-recognition of an individual or a community that has been historically, socially and culturally excluded by the dominant classes of the society. A Dalit self, then, in the formation of such an astute and historically rooted political identity, aims to assert self-respect, dignity and its relative diminished status in the society by confronting its demeaning image as projected by the dominant classes (Bharti, 2017: 35).

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Who are the Dalits?

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2. How has the concept of 'reference group' been used in Dalit mobility?

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## 7.4 DALIT MOVEMENT IN INDIA

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Dalit mobilisation in India has mostly been centred around the issue of untouchability. Shah (1980) classifies them into two categories - a) reformative; and b) alternative movements. Reformative movements, as the term suggests, have focused on the reformation of the caste system by focusing on the problem of untouchability. Bhakti movements, neo-Vedantik movements and Sanskritisation movements are prominent examples. The alternative movement aims to construct a structure completely different from the existing social system through both secular and non-secular means. For instance, conversion to other religions has been a mechanism of breaking loose from the oppression of untouchability, or acquiring education, economic and political power. Both types of movements use political means to attain their objectives. In the context of Dalit identity and ideology Shah has recently further classified them into (1) movements within cultural consensus; (2) competing for ideology and non-Hindu identity; (3) Buddhist Dalits; and (4) counter-ideology and Dalit identity. The first three are based around religious ideologies whereas the last is based on class (2001 a). Patankar and Omvedt classify the Dalit movements into (1) caste-based; and (2) class-based movements. In the 1990s, with the increased political participation in elections and somewhat political success of the Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh, some scholars consider their mobilisation as a 'new political movement' of the Dalits (Pai 2000).

The Bhakti movement involved a form of worshipping God through devotion and personal communication. This includes the belief in two forms of god- Vishnu or Shiv, thus leading to the rise of two sect - the Vaishnavite or Shaivite traditions. It preaches equality among all the castes though it subscribes to the *varnashrama dharma* and the caste social order. Another aspect of the bhakti movement is the belief in a formless universal God. Ravidas and Kabir are the major figures of this tradition who resisted

caste hierarchies thus making their ideas popular among the Dalits. The Neo-Vedantik movements, on the other hand, were started by Hindu reformers and leaders as a means to remove untouchability by incorporating them into the Hindu society. This will be discussed in more details in the next section.

Omvedt and Patankar (1979) emphasised on the role of the Dalit liberation movement in colonial India and its contribution to the communist and national movement. While the major focus of the reformers was on the social elements, the need to look at Indian caste feudalism was largely overlooked. The relations of production in the Indian feudal system was that they did not simply bind peasants and other producers to land controlled by feudal lords and to the service of feudal lords. Rather, they bound all toilers to specifically defined occupations and duties according to the kinship group of their birth, thus forming dual systems to hierarchies- one in relation to land (such as peasants to tenant cultivators) and the other to their hereditary occupation (artisans and service castes like goldsmiths, weavers etc). This was overlaid by the Jajmani system and ideology of purity and pollution thereby institutionalising hierarchy and inequality among the exploited. Thus, Omvedt and Patankar (1979) looked at the Dalit movement in consonance with the anti-feudal movement in colonial India.

The humiliation and the exploitation that Dalits experiences gave rise to may leaders and writers among them who made others realise the injustice that was thrown up them. The coming of leaders like Phule and Ambedkar are two such instances. After independence, in the 1970s, the Dalit Panther Movement, inspired by the Black movement in the US, began in Maharashtra. The most fundamental factor responsible for the rise of Dalit Panthers was the repression and terror under which the oppressed Dalits continued to live in the rural area.



#### **7.4.1 Dalit Movement and Socio-Religious Reforms in Pre-Independence India**

Dalits constitute a heterogeneous category of numerous traditional Ex-untouchable castes and the attempts at their mobilisation, emancipation and empowerment differed from region to region. In the pre-independence era, it was the Neo-Vedantik reformers who attempted to remove untouchability by taking them into the fold of the caste system. According to the pioneers of these movements, untouchability was not an essential part of Hinduism and, for that matter, of the caste system. Most notable is Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, who believed that the caste system was a political institution created by the rulers 'for the common good of society, and not a natural or religious distinction'.

The coming in of the Christian missionaries and the subsequent challenge of the traditional practices made the reformers and the revivalist re-evaluate the existing structures of oppression. This along with the non-non-Brahmin movements played an important role in developing anti-caste or anti-Hinduism Dalit movements in some parts of the country (Shah, 2001). However, the reformist attitude of the Arya Samaj was against the political movements of the untouchables and went against any move initiated by the untouchables for their solidarity and integration and thus the reform movement failed as it tried to bring changes within the confines of the caste system and through the process of Sanskritisation. The role of Jyotirao Phule is significant here as unlike other reformers of his time, Phule sought for resistance by attacking and challenging Brahminism. We shall briefly look at the contributions of Phule in the following section.

#### **7.4.2 The Role of Jyotirao Phule**

Jyotirao Phule (1827-1890), also known as Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, who had coined the term 'Dalit' (downtrodden or oppressed), was modern India's first reformer who offered a systematic theory of caste by opposing untouchability and called for the complete demolition of its oppressive structure. Through his famous work *Gulamgiri* (1873) he presented a socio-

cultural analysis that was deeply critical of caste-Varna domination and attacked the Vedas as ideologies of a Brahman mind that enslaved Shudras and Atishudras. According to Phule, Brahminism is the ideological and institutional system of monopolizing knowledge and power by a particular class which excludes, divides and dominates other groups in the society. He argued that even before trying to overturn the material power of the upper castes, it was necessary to step out of the ideologies of Brahmanism for which proper access to knowledge was an essential prerequisite. Thus, he looked at education as a tool particularly for women and Sudras to emancipate themselves. Phule along with his wife, Savitri Rao Phule, an equally important Dalit reformer, started a massive work of education by starting various schools in and around Poona including the first-ever school for Dalit girls in 1848 (Begari, 2010). Phule along with his followers formed the Satyashodhak Samaj ('Seekers of Truth') in 1873 in a bid to attain equal social and economic benefits for the lower castes in Maharashtra and with the aim of liberating non-Brahmins from the clutches of Brahminism and its members were exhorted to spread make them aware of their rights and social and public education was regarded as the highest importance. He established schools for working people, a home for offspring born of socially unrecognised unions, and joined widow remarriage campaign. In 1868, after the death of his father, he opened the water tank of his house to the ex-untouchable castes. Phule made every effort to bring together all labouring classes- Kumbhis, Malis, Dhangars, Muslims, Bhils, Kolis, Mahars, - under an umbrella organization to wage a morality-driven and knowledge-based struggle against Brahmanical falsehood with an idea of uniting the peasant castes with the Dalits and the Muslim masses.

In the pre-Independence period, thus we see how Phule led the strong non-Brahman movement against Brahmanism in Maharashtra. There was also the Adi Dravidas movement in Tamil Nadu, Shri Narayan Dharma Paripalan movement in Kerala, Adi Andhra movement in Coastal Andhra,

and Bengal and Adi-Hindu movement in Uttar Pradesh. However, it was the anti-untouchability movement was launched by Dr Ambedkar in the 1920s in Maharashtra that truly laid the foundation for the spread of a pan-Indian movement. Ambedkar has been recognised as the true ideological successor to Phule's vision of Dalit mobility. We shall now look at the contributions of Ambedkar in the following section.

#### **7.4.3 B.R Ambedkar and Dalit Movement**

Babasaheb Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956) was one of the prominent thinkers of modern India. He was a social reformer, a jurist, an economist as well as politician who was the architect of the Constitution of India and campaigned for the abolition of discrimination against untouchability and Dalits and supported rights of women against Brahmanical patriarchy. During the 1920s, the Mahars under the leadership of Ambedkar launched unsuccessful satyagrahas against untouchability in Maharashtra. Ambedkar, who saw the possibility of advancement for the untouchables using political means to achieve social and economic equality' organised the Independent Labour Party (ILP) on secular lines for protecting the interests of the labouring classes (Shah,2001). Later, Ambedkar formed the All India Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF) in 1942, to fight elections and look after the interests of the SCs.

Ambedkar's vision of a social-political reform which included abolition and radical transformation of the existing Hindu structure did not sit well with the leaders of Congress, particularly Mahatma Gandhi. Like Phule, Ambedkar too saw the hegemony of Brahminical ideological expression over the society sought the destruction of caste oppression and chaturvarna system through the abolition of Manusmriti and the shastras (Ambedkar, 1936). According to him, sati, child marriage and endogamy were mechanisms that Brahminism created in order to maintain order and superiority in the society (Ambedkar,1927). The major contribution of Ambedkar was in the formulation of a constitutional democracy which would support and uphold the rights of all and provide justice. He called

for a welfare state which would provide affirmative rights for the exploited and marginalized through autonomous political representation, and reservation for the disadvantaged groups in public employment which would be based on the inclusive conception of rights.

While Ambedkar proposed political and legal reforms, his disillusionment with Hindu social reformers and conflict with Gandhi over separate electorates left him questioning the possibility of complete democratic reform. In 1935, Ambedkar announced his intention of renouncing Hindu society and after twenty years, in 1956, he along with his followers converted to Buddhism. Dirks (2001) saw this step as fundamental to Ambedkar's act of choosing a religion that was not only indigenous to the land, like Hinduism but also, in contrast to latter, could be "conceived as rational, ethical and unburdened by a sacerdotal hierarchy".

#### **7.4.4 Post- Independence, Role of Political Parties and Dalit Feminism**

The role of Ambedkar and the formation of the AISC and later the Republican Party of India (RPI) was a very significant development in the history of Dalit mobilisation in the country. By the mid-1960s it had established itself in the state of Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. However, due to internal factions, it weakened and its alliance with Congress led to the dilution of its larger goals. The failure of the RPI to uphold the ideals of Ambedkar and to fulfil the aspirations of the Dalit youths led to the formation of the Dalit Panthers in Bombay in 1972. The Panthers condemn and discard the dominant culture and attempt to build an alternative socio-cultural identity for the oppressed classes. The Dalit Panthers organised demonstrations against injustices to the SCs. However, most of their activities were limited to propagating their ideas by publishing original literature such as poems, stories, plays which are used as a means of protest the Hindu intellectual tradition, the Hindu religion and Hindu ethics (Shah,2001). The formation of the Bahujan Samaj Party(BSP) in Uttar Pradesh in 1984 marked the new shift in Dalit mobilisation and caste politics in India. While the Ambedkarites in west were caught up in

ideological and strategic struggles, and their lack of cohesive organisational abilities led to the failures, the BSP by Kanshi Ram was successful due to the decline of Congress power as well as their deliberate tactic to organise the elite section of the Dalits who had benefited from the policies of reservation of the Government. The joining of Mayawati, who came from the Chamar caste, solidified the strength of the party and she spent four (1995 and again in 1997, then from 2002 to 2003 and from 2007 to 2012) as Chief Minister of the state.

Rege (1998) highlighted the triple oppression that Dalit women faced as women and as members of the caste and of class. According to Rege, both the Panthers movement and the larger women's movement focused on politics that led to the universalization of "what in reality was the middle class, upper caste women's experience or alternatively the Dalit male experience". The increasing visibility of Dalit women in power structures as the panchayat and in the new knowledge making processes has led to an increased backlash against women through a range of humiliating and violent practices such as rape, lynching or murder of women and their kinsmen. Dalit feminism thus pushes for the intersectionality of caste, class and gender structures. and for a reformulation of our feminist agenda, to reclaim our issues and reconceptualize them such that feminist politics poses a challenge to the caste/class conceptualization of Brahmanical Hindutva (Rege,1998).

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## **7.5 SUMMING UP**

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In this unit, we learned about the histories of Dalit identity formation, untouchability and role of Dalit leaders and organisations in the mobilisation and empowerment of the people.

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## 7.6 QUESTIONS

1. Explain the meaning of “Dalit” and discuss Dalit mobilisation during the pre-colonial period.
2. Discuss the nature of untouchability in the context of caste system in India.
3. What were the contributions of Phule and Ambedkar in the empowerment of Dalits in India?

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## **UNIT 8: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA: TRIBAL MOVEMENT**

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Objectives

8.3 The Genesis of Tribe as a Category

8.4 Tribal Movements: A Socio-Historical Analysis

8.4.1 British Period

8.4.2 Post Independence Period

8.4.3 The Period of Globalisation

8.5 Social Movements in Northeast India

8.6 The Contradictions of Development and the Tribal Question: An Analysis of Central India

8.7 Summing Up

8.8 Questions

8.9 Recommended Readings and References

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### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

Changes and conflicts can both be regarded as social facts. Conflict is a universal and general process in every society, be it a highly integrated community or a pluralistic group. As such every social system develops its own mechanism to resolve conflicts. Nonetheless, the structural contradictions in these social groups often become so much controlling and the available mechanisms so deficient in accommodating change and



transformation in resolving tension and conflicts that a strong longing is felt for remodelling the system. Under the condition, the conscious and enlightened groups embark on organizing themselves around certain ideals and ideas with a programme of action for bringing change in the existing system (Karna, 2016). Such a process of organization gives rise to a movement. Therefore, noted sociologist Professor T.K Oommen argues that only when an elementary collective action like crowd behaviour or mass action acquires organization and form, a body of customs and traditions, established leadership, social rules and values, in short, a culture, it becomes a social movement (Oommen, 2010). In this regard, what is important to understand is that social movements are very demanding. It seeks recognition and acceptance of its demands, ideas, values and interests. This is achieved by appealing the collective conscience of people. However, this entire process of triggering a mere collective action into a movement is possible only when it is marked by a definite goal, ideology, social organization and leadership. These are the foundations on which the edifice of social movement stands (Hussein, 1989).

In this context, the history of social movements in tribal areas of the country is very old. According to historical records, many social movements had taken place in tribal inhabited areas during British and even pre-British days. Most of these movements were local and reformative in nature. However, these movements eventually shifted from the issue of social transformation in their culture and lifestyle to their dignity, honour, human rights and so on. Again in due course of time with growing interaction with unequal forces, the nature and roots of social movements became diverse. Consequently, the local movements are no more local but have broadened in terms of its organization, style of functioning and issues raised. Even the support base of these movements seem to be widened with electronic media and civil society organizations providing significant space to them. In many cases, these movements have either halted, slowed or forced the agents to rethink the model of development introduced in tribal

areas as well as the interests of tribal masses particularly with reference to *jal, jungle and zameen*. Therefore, all of these developmental projects, as well as various social movements, have impacted tribal culture and tradition in a myriad of ways (Chaudhary, 2016).

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## 8.2 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit, we will attempt to look at the different aspects of tribal movements. By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Analyse the category of tribe from a socio-historical context;
- Analyse critically the various factors that precipitated into movements amongst many tribal groups;
- Discuss the tribal issues in the Northeast region of the country;
- Explain the relationship between investment induced development and tribal unrest.

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## 8.3 THE GENESIS OF TRIBE AS A CATEGORY

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Before delving into the socio-historical context of tribal movement, it is important to understand what is a tribe. The tribe as a category of people emerged during colonial rule. It is however not to say that tribes did not exist before the British invaded India. But the way these groups were solidified by the British through the process of classification and enumeration and gave a general identity as tribe was different than what existed earlier as groups with distinct local and regional nomenclatures. Some attempts have also been made to identify the category of *jana* in Indian history as roughly corresponding to the modern category of tribe, which is associated with an egalitarian system and therefore, in opposition to *jati* or *caste* with a hierarchical system of organization. However, later when the British began to map India, they used the term tribe in more than one sense for their own administrative convenience. One sense in which it was used was to refer to a group of people claiming common descent from a common ancestor. The other was to refer to people or communities living

in primitive conditions, isolated from the rest of the society. When we move from administrative to anthropological literature, usually there is no easy consensus on the characteristics of tribes. However, in the Indian context, it is the administrative rather than anthropological distinction that holds sway. Hence, tribes are treated as those that are enlisted in the Indian constitution in the list of Scheduled Tribes. The Constitution defines Scheduled Tribes as ‘tribe or tribal community or part of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under article 342 to be scheduled tribes(Xaxa, 2003).

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	1. What is a tribe? ----- -----
	2. How does the Indian Constitution define Scheduled Tribes? ----- ----- -----

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#### 8.4 TRIBAL MOVEMENTS: A SOCIO-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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By navigating various uprisings that have had taken place in tribal areas led by different tribal communities, one could understand the following aspects:

1) There were a series of ethnic rebellions during the early days of the British rule in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Sarai Larai (1885) and Birsa Movement (1895-1900) among the Munda; Ganga Narain Hangama (1832); Rebellion of the Kacha Nagas (the 1880s), and so on.

2)Following these tribal rebellions or sometimes without precedence, there have been a series of reform movements emulating the cultural patterns of the upper Hindu castes. Bhagat movement among the Oraon, Vaishnavite reform movement among the Bhumij for Rajput recognition, Kherwer movement among the Santal, etc.

3)The emergence of inter-tribal political association and movements for recognition as ‘tribal’ states within.

4)Violent Secessionist movements among tribes located near the international frontier: Nagaland movement, Mizo National Front movement and so on.

5) Pockets of violent political movements in the tribal belts linked with the general problem of agrarian unrest and the communist movement. Naxalbari movement (1967), Girijan Rebellion at Srikakulam (1968-9), etc. (Sinha, 2010).

The aforementioned crises which have occurred need analysis as to why and how they have caused. In arguing social movements to be social facts and social action, one needs to understand that there are socio-historical and political antecedents which have lent them the sociological significance to be critically studied. It is crucial to note that since the pre-colonial times in India, the tribal people had linkages with the outside world in spite of living in autonomy with their distinctive tradition, culture, religion, language and identity. The amount of interaction between tribes and non-tribal culture was limited up to the establishment of Hindu rule in tribal areas. As the frequency of interaction between them increased, the amount of autonomy enjoyed by the former reduced. For instance, with the setting of Maratha rule in Madhya Pradesh, there was also the entry of castes like Jata and Patidars from neighbouring states to promote deforestation and initiate farm work as the tribals of the area were not interested in settled farm work. Consequently, the practice of shifting cultivation of the tribal

groups was discouraged thereby affecting their quality of life (Chaudhary, 2016).

#### **8.4.1 British Period**

As far as the colonial period is concerned, the British administration perceived forest and other resources available in the forest in a commodified manner. This thinking led to the enactment of different forest-related laws which benefitted the British administration and quickened the ongoing process of the ruination of natural resources and thereby pauperisation of tribal masses. Important among these laws are the Forest Act of 1865, the Forest Act of 1878, the Forest Policy of 1894 and the Forest Act of 1927. All these measures led to deforestation and dwindled tribal access to and control over forest and related resources.

#### **8.4.2 Post-Independence Period**

After the country attained independence, immediately the first National Forest Policy was enacted in 1952. However, it was just a prototype of the acts and policies of the British period. This development was dysfunctional for tribals in multiple ways which made Elwin (1943) coin the term 'Loss of Nerve' for them to refer to the despicable social and economic conditions of the tribes. This phrase clearly depicts that once upon a time tribals had nerve but due to acculturation with outsiders, they lost their nerve or what may be called identity and heritage. However, after realising the pitiable socio-economic status of tribes, efforts were made to restore them through a number of constitutional provisions such as the establishment of the National Commission of SCs and STs. But unfortunately, most of these policies were formulated without taking serious note of the ground reality (Chaudhary, 2016).

Besides, studies have revealed that local leaders have played a crucial role in the mitigation of problems faced by tribes for a long time. But with the advent of democratic politics which introduced institutional leadership and political institutions, the situation began to change. The tribal leaders

became accountable not to the tribes but to their political boss and turned to be agents of change and development as per the wishes of the state. Many of them got involved in corruption and red-tapism and with the accumulation of power, they adopted distinct ways of life, particularly those of non-tribal elites thereby making them outsiders in their homeland. Hence, the fruition of tribal development schemes and policies remained a distant reality and rather than inclusion and integration, assimilation was promoted by these leaders (Chaudhary, 2016).

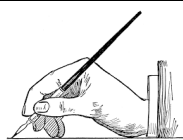
#### **8.4.3 The Period of Globalisation**

Moreover, as soon as globalisation came to India during the 1990s, tribal areas were identified as proper places for investments and establishment of mega-development projects because of their rich resources and logistic convenience. Due to these projects, thousands of tribes have been displaced from their homes without adequate rehabilitation. It is true that hundreds of jobs of various types have been created by the investors but in most of these cases, only non-tribal workers and specialists are recruited. It has serious demographic and cultural consequences as tribes are becoming inferior in their own homeland. In this regard, the state is either silent or siding with the investors in the so-called national interest. In the recent past, the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility has acquired popularity. The state has made it mandatory for factories, mines etc to practice the guidelines of CSR. However, critically speaking CSR is a myth since it has miserably failed to address even those problems for the emergence of which these organisations are largely responsible (Chaudhary, 2016).

As a consequence of incessant discrimination, atrocities and very palliative response to their issues and problems, tribal groups have always been resisting these unscrupulous moves. During the last few decades, tribes of Central India particularly in the states of Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh where a large number of tribes are found participating in different social movements. These movements are particularly in favour

of their human rights. *Narmada Bachao Andolan* and related ecological movements have been addressing the environmental questions. It is also directed for proper rehabilitation of the victims of what Padel, called *investment induced displacement*. It is for looking at the issues of human rights and dignity of tribes and that they are the original custodian of *jal, jungle and zameen* and they should have control over these things. But the alien forces, including the state, is completely in opposition to this view. Rather, every possible step is being taken to keep them away from these resources. The problem also is that these movements have not been able to totally provide relief to the tribal people. In some cases, they create more troubles instead of reducing them. The Naxalite Movement is such one example. Therefore, it is important to understand the different facets of these movements and their effect on tribal societies in general (Chaudhary, 2016).

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. How has the process of globalisation affected the tribal areas?

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2. What is CSR?

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### 8.5 SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN NORTHEAST INDIA

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Northeast India stands out for its unique ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity not to be found in any other region of the country. The ethnic heterogeneity of the region is remarkable which also unfolds a

complexity based on distinctive historical experiences. Compared to other parts of the country, the colonial incorporation of the Northeast began much later. While Manipur and Tripura were independent principalities maintaining relations with the British since the late eighteenth century, the colonial ruler annexed Assam in 1826 and subsequently the Naga, Mizo, Khasi, Jaintia and the Garo hills. Thus, by the middle of the nineteenth century, a substantial area came under the overall control of the colonial authority but no strong linkages were established with the outside market, except for the tea plantation. That being the case, the regional economy remained outside the orbit of capitalist development for a long time. Moreover, the robust kinship ties, communitarian control of land and associated social networks provided a solid base for building ethnic identity, political unity and economic independence. Nonetheless, the Northeast region has experienced one or other type of movement. Although the various movements witnessed in the region have maintained discernible differences in their forms, timings, areas of influence, ideological orientation and mass base yet these have maintained a strong underlying unity in their content and socio-economic base (Karna, 2016).

It is also crucial to note that most of the tribal-dominated areas have a negative perception of the Indian nation-state. This is clearly manifested in various nationality movements, mostly expressed in terms of secessionism. The articulation of Naga issue in terms of nation and the demand for Naga sovereignty is the oldest movement of the region. It was the Naga National Council formed in 1946 which has been spearheading the demand for a separate sovereign Naga nation. Similarly, in Mizoram the Mizo-National Famine Front formed on 2 October 1961 under the leadership of Pu Laldenga gave birth to the demand for a sovereign Greater Mizoram. It was supposed to be organised along the ethnic lines. Another case of secessionist demand was seen in Assam when the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), a by-product of the Assam Movement launched in 1979, propagated the idea of Assamese nation outside India. In fact, the All Assam Students Union (AASU), the Asom Gan Parishad (AGP) and the



ULFA are a manifestation of the single political ideology representing Assamese sub- nationalism (Karna, 2016).

According to M.N Karna, the problems and crisis witnessed in the North East in the wake of extra-constitutional movements should be defined in terms of identity or ideology. It is opined that the crisis in the Northeast is one of conflict between ethnicity and nationalism, a matter ultimately of identities and allegiances. It is also crucial to note that whenever the problems of the Northeast are brought in the debate with regard to the political aspiration of the people, they are generally determined by the concepts such as national integration, national unity and the Indian Constitution. In this context, Mrinal Miri (1999) captures this situation very succinctly. “As very little debate is possible outside these bounds, movements for independence very quickly turn into armed struggles or insurgencies. The official Indian response to this is an armed solution whether in the form of army operation or police action. A factor which, perhaps, contributes towards violent expression of aspirations for political independence is the absence of a language native to a community...The official stance on these movements has, more often than not, been reactive rather than responsive –more like reflex actions than something informed by intelligence, sensitivity, care and concern”. (Karna, 2016)

Besides the political upheaval, the economy of the Northeast is another dimension which has triggered various movements in the region. It is a well-known fact that the region is in abundance with rich resources starting from oil, plywood, soil to grow tea plants, bamboo trees etc. However, hardly one could figure a sprawling industry and even if there are like the tea and oil industries, the beneficiaries of these industries are not the people of the region. Besides, like the rest of the tribal belts, a dominance of the non-tribal communities in the jobs generated by these industries as well as in other trade and commerce could be seen. In addition to it, the burgeoning unemployment scenario and the agricultural stagnation are also some of the

contributory causes of the tensions and subsequent protests prevailing amongst the tribal groups of the region.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. How has the economy of Northeast India served as a dimension for triggering various movements in the region?

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## 8.6 THE CONTRADICTIONS OF DEVELOPMENT AND THE TRIBAL QUESTION: AN ANALYSIS OF CENTRAL INDIA

The interlinking of the areas rich in resources but economically poor with prosperous urban areas under the globalised market economy has now initiated a process by which the resources and cheap labour is being drained out from these poor areas. At the global level, the natural resources of the poor countries are being drawn into prosperous countries for profit maximization. At the national level, this process of internal colonialism is enriching the rich areas at the cost of marginalised natural resource-rich 5<sup>th</sup> schedule tribal areas. The draining off of resources from these areas on one hand and the resultant fall out of the negative impact of the development process in terms of environmental degradation, impoverishment and displacement on other hand have led to tribal unrest and eventually movements in tribal areas particularly in Central India (Joshi, 2016). In the post-independence period, the concept of national development was defined primarily in economic terms which is why issues of equity and justice, sustainability and ecological stability were majorly overlooked.

Due to this approach of development, tribal areas which were already considered as resource-rich had been chosen for the establishment of various developmental projects without doing a critical examination of their cultural, economic and environmental consequences on the locals in particular. It was capitalistic in nature with emphasis on a top-down approach. When globalisation came to India, this process got even more intensified. It had added more fuel to the fire on the ongoing development or what Padel (2013) called ‘investment induced displacement’, degeneration and marginalization of the tribes while increasing the number of various types of industries and development projects in tribal areas (Chaudhary, 2016).

It now seems that during the globalisation period, maximum parts of these resources are grabbed by the agents and representative of market forces. Tribals have no access to these resources. Even the rehabilitation policies are full of discrepancies as there is a wide gap between what is promised and what is performed. In reaction to the growing frustration and anxieties among tribal communities in Central India such as Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, there have been many social movements in these areas. These movements are basically a collective response to injustice, both historical and contemporary, committed on tribes and their socio-environmental heritage and life-supporting resources by external forces. Most of these local level movements are against the exploitation of natural resources, land encroachment, the establishment of mega development projects and atrocities on tribals by different interest groups including the state. Narmada Bachao Andolan, Kalinganagar Movement in Odisha against the establishment of a steel plant by TATA, Lanjigarh, Niyamgiri Movement against Vedanta Aluminium Ltd are to name a few movements that have been going on in these areas (Joshi, 2016).

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## 8.7 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we learned about the various trajectories of tribal movements and the associated issues. We have understood that the blithe and discriminatory approach of the authority has pushed the tribal people to the fringes from their resources, homes and heritage. As a consequence, there has been unrest in many tribal areas demanding a life of dignity and equality.

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## 8.8 QUESTIONS

1. Explain the various historical as well as contemporary factors that have caused tribal movements in the country at different points of time.
2. Why do tribal groups in Central India resent the large scale developmental projects spearheaded by the state and private corporations?
3. What are the socio-economic and political bases of social movements in the Tribal Areas of North-East India?

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## 8.9 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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- Hussein, M. (1989). The Assam Movement: A Sociological Study. *PhD Dissertation*. New Delhi, New Delhi, India: Jawaharlal Nehru University.
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## **UNIT 9: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA: LABOUR AND TRADE UNION MOVEMENT**

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

9.1 Introduction

9.2 Objective

9.3 Concept and Definition of Labour and Trade Union

9.4 Characteristics of Trade Union

9.5 History of Trade Union in India

9.5.1 Early Period

9.5.2 Modest Beginning

9.5.3 Left-Wing Trade Unionism

9.5.4 Second World War and its Effects

9.5.5 Post War Period: Emergence of the AIBEA (1946)

9.5.6 Post Independence Period: Formation of the Indian National  
Trade Union Congress (INTUC) (1947)

9.6 Classification of Trade Unions in India

9.7 Merits and Demerits of Trade Unions in India

9.7.1 Merits

9.7.2 Demerits

9.8 Summing Up

9.9 Questions

9.10 Recommended Readings and References

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## 9.1 INTRODUCTION

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A trade union is the result of the industrialization, which is based on labour philosophy -"united we stand, divided we fall." (Ramanujam,1990). In general trade unions can be viewed as an organization that is built up for the purpose of securing certain benefits. It was in the early stage of industrialization that the workers felt that they were exploited and working without any legal protections so they joined hands to protect their interest through collective actions. Workers also found this system more beneficial to deal with a group or a representative of a group rather than going through the entire process individually over a length of time.

Trade unions are organisations of the employees or workers who work for the maintenance and enhancement of their economic status by insisting on a rise in wages and improvement in working conditions and benefits. Besides this economic objective, there are other dimensions of trade unions which have gained importance in the context of the changing socio-political environment. The workers are not just a factor of production but an individual whose total life situation becomes a matter of concern for the trade unions. According to Gandhi, trade unions are moral institutions aiming to make the workers better individuals and responsible citizens. Trade unions are considered to be institutions experimenting with industrial democracy which would strengthen democracy.

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## 9.2 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit, we will try to understand the meaning of labour and trade union, the history of trade unions, the various classification of trade union in India and the various merits and demerits of it.

By the end of the unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the meaning trade unions;
- Write about the various definitions of it;
- Explain the different phases of the growth of trade union;

- Analyse the classification of trade unions in India;
- Analyse the merits and demerits of the Indian trade unions.

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### **9.3 CONCEPT AND DEFINITION OF LABOUR AND TRADE UNION**

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Generally, trade unions can be described as groups of employees that become a part of the organization to secure various benefits. However, with the changing socio-economic situation, the activities of trade unions are not confined to only securing the economic benefits; rather it includes welfare activities, environmental conditions and other benefits for workers. In the present context, there are even voluntary organizations formed to protect and promote their socio-economic benefits through collective actions.

According to S.D. Punecker, “A trade union is a monopolistic combination of wage-earners who as individual producers are complementary to one another but who stand to employers in a relation of dependence for the sale of their labour and production, and that the general purpose of association is in view of that dependence to strengthen their power to bargain with the employers or bargaining collectively.”<sup>1</sup>

According to Giri, "Trade union is a voluntary organization of worker formed to protect and promote their interest by the collective action."<sup>2</sup>

In the words of Dale Yoder, “A union is a continuing, long-term association of employees formed and maintained for the specific purpose of advancing and protecting the interests of members in their working relationships.”<sup>3</sup>

Indian Trade Unions Act, 1926 defines trade unions as “any combination, whether temporary or permanent, formed primarily for the purpose of regulating the relations between workmen and employers or between

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<sup>1</sup>Punecker, S.D. “Trade Unionism in India” (1948) p. 23.

<sup>2</sup>Giri V.V., Labour Problems in Indian Industry, p.1.

<sup>3</sup>Dale Yoder, “Personnel Management and Industrial Relations” (1974) p. 524, Prentice Hall, New Delhi.



workmen and workmen, or between employers and employers, or for imposing restrictive conditions on the conduct of any trade or business, and includes any federation of two or more trade unions”<sup>4</sup>

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## 9.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF TRADE UNION

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The following are the characteristics of the trade unions –

1. **The trade union is an association either of employer or employees or of independent workers-** A trade union can be formed by employees, labourers, independent workers or employers themselves. Accordingly, India has many such unions like the general labour unions; the friendly societies; Merchant's or employers' association like the all India Manufacturer Organization; Combination of intellectual labour like the National Federation of Post and Telegraphs workers etc. On the other hand, in China, they refer to the trade union as an association of members of manual wage earners in enterprise, institution, school and working class engaged in irregular employment.
2. **Labour unions are a relatively permanent association of worker and are not temporary or casual –** A labour union is a permanent association with a long term body rather than a loose or a temporary association. They take longer periods of time to achieve their objectives and, therefore, require a strong body and a permanent association.
3. **The origin and growth of trade unions have been influenced by a number of ideologies -**  
The origin and growth of the trade unions have been influenced by many social, economic and even political movements. For example, Marx's and Engel's theory of class war influenced trade union in a number of ways. Their theory of class conflict and dialectical materialism created a class of trade unionists who regard labour

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<sup>4</sup>Sec. 2(h) of The Trade Unions Act, 1926.

organization as inevitable for bringing about a revolutionary change in the social order.

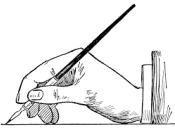
**4. The character of trade unions has been constantly changing –**

With the dynamic structure of the socio-economic and political events, it has been important for the trade unions to adapt to the changing scenario. Due to this, certain changings became mandatory for the unions. Now, trade unions are not only confined to the cause of the members of the unions, rather these have evolved to be institutions which take into their purview the entire social, cultural and political development of the country. (Mathur and Beatrice, 1957).

**5. A trade union is an association of workers who are engaged in securing economic benefits for its members –**

The purpose of a trade union is to secure control of the supply of labour in one or more market and to maintain the rate of the wage of labour as well as the condition under which it works. However, this does not mean that the advancement of the economic interest of its members is the sole purpose of a trade union. They also try to put forward the social, political and cultural interests of its members.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	<p>1. Define trade union.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>
	<p>2. Write two characteristics of trade union.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>

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## **9.5 HISTORY OF TRADE UNION IN INDIA**

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Trade unions in India, as in most other countries, have been the consequence of the modern factory system. The development of trade unionism in India has a history and a stormy career. The history can be divided into the early period and the modest beginning -

### **9.5.1 Early Period**

Efforts towards organising the workers for their welfare were made during the early period of industrial development by social working philanthropists and other religious leaders mostly on humanitarian grounds. The first factories Act, 1891, was passed on the basis of the recommendations of the Bombay Factory Commission, 1884. Due to the limitations of the Act, the workers in the Bombay Textile Industry under the leadership of N. Lokhande demanded reduced hours of work, weekly rest days, mid-day recess and compensation for injuries. The Bombay Mill-owners' Association accepted the demand for weekly holidays. The first Workers' Union, Bombay Mill-hands Association, in India was established by Lokhande in 1890 and a labour journal called "Dinabandu" was also published.

There were some other unions that were established at that period but these unions were treated just as ad hoc bodies as they could not serve the purpose of trade unions. Some of these are Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants of India and Burma(1897), Management and Printers' Union, Calcutta (1905) and the Bombay Postal Unions (1907).

### **9.5.2 Modest Beginning**

The emergence of the modern concept of trade union can be traced back to the outbreak of World War I. The dynamic situations like the economic, political and social conditions of the time influenced the growth of the movement in India. The formation of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 1919 helped the formation of the other trade unions in the country and the Madras Labour Union was also formed on systematic lines in the

same year. These unions were later merged into an industrial union which was known as Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association. These unions functioned on the grounds of the Gandhian Philosophy of mutual trust, collaboration and non-violence.

1920 has been always marked as the landmark of the history of Indian Trade Union movement as the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) was formed because of the necessity of electing delegates for the International Labour Organisation (ILO), thus becoming the first all Indian trade union in the country. The first meeting of the AITUC was held in October 1920 at Bombay (now Mumbai) under the presidentship of Lala Lajpat Rai. The formation of AITUC led to the establishment of All India Railwaymen's Federation (AIRF) in 1924.

### **9.5.3 Left-Wing Trade Unionism**

During this period, there was the emergence of communists on the Indian scene. The communists had captured the All India Trade Union Congress. Therefore, the moderates established a new organization which is known as the All India Trade Union Federation. The ideological differences had their effect on strikes. During this period, the majority of the strikes failed. Legislation was enacted in the form of Workmen's Compensation Act, 1923, The Mines Act, 1923, the Trade Unions Act, 1926 and the Trade Disputes Act, 1929 which boosted the labour union movement. The Trade Unions Act, 1926 gave formal recognition of trade unions

### **9.5.4 Second World War and Its Effects**

India was under the British rule and the reforms under the Government of India Act of 1935 and the introduction of Provincial Autonomy gave a fresh impetus to the trade union movement in India. During the Second World War, the trade unions engaged themselves in the fight for political independence. The trade union activity during this period was restrained by numerous notifications and ordinances issued by the Government imposing bans on strikes and lock-outs under wartime regulations, known as Defence

of India Rules (DIR) (1944). This was a period of stress and strain and there was a good deal of confusion because nothing was clear.

#### **9.5.5 Post War Period: Emergence of the AIBEA (1946)**

After the end of the war (1945) the political and economic conditions in the country were rather uncertain. There were numerous strikes during 1946-47, notable among them being those of the railway and postal employees, the dock workers and Uttar Pradesh U.P. primary school teachers. It was during the post-war period that the trade union movement in the banking industry also gained momentum. Although bank employees started systematic battles with the employers in 1944, when Parvana H.L. and about 35 others were victimised in May 1944, for forming a union in the Punjab National Bank (Lahore), the first conference of the All India Bank Employees Association (AIBEA) was held only at Calcutta on 20th April 1946. Thus, the AIBEA came into existence in 1946.

#### **9.5.6 Post Independence Period: Formation of the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) (1947)**

Independence brought new hopes and promises of a brighter future for the teeming millions of India. After slavery of about 200 years, the country finally achieved its freedom from the British colonial rule. Things were taking a different turn as far as the trade union movement was concerned. Differences between the moderates and the revolutionary leaders of the AITUC had developed to such an extent that the Congress nationalist leaders decided to form a separate central trade union organisation of their own and thus the INTUC was formed on 3rd May 1947. As a result of this split, the revolutionary and militant forces of the AITUC had their own way of shaping the organisation's policies and guiding its activities.

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## **9.6 CLASSIFICATION OF TRADE UNIONS IN INDIA**

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The classification and the structure of the Trade Unions in India are based on the composition of its members and the level it is associated into i.e. regional, state or national level, and based on that, it is classified either as a craft union, industrial union or general union.

### **1. Craft Union –**

A craft union is an organization of workers employed in a particular craft or trade or wage earners. It gathers those workers who have similar skills, crafts or specifications irrespective of the industries they are employed in. It is mostly formed by non-manual employees and professional workers. For example, the electricians, though working in different industries, may form a union of electricians or union of carpenters, etc. Some of the examples of Indian craft unions are the International Wood Carvers' Association and the Indian Pilots' Guild.

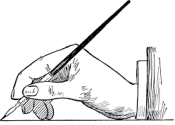
### **2. Industrial Union –**

An industrial union is an organization which comprises different craftsmen or skilled workers together in one industry irrespective of their specifications, positions or sex. Here, the membership is large and it creates a feeling of unity. For example, if the workers of the cotton textile want to form a union consisting of different workers of different craft then such a union is known as an industrial union. In India, the Textile Association of Ahmedabad and the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh are such examples.

### **3. General Union –**

The general union is one where the union consists of the workers employed in different industries and craft. It has numerical superiority as it is open to a large section of workers. This form of union is more ideal but its growth in India is low. Jamshedpur Labour Union, the National Union of Municipal and General Workers are such examples in India.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	1. What is INTUC? -----
	2. What is the difference between craft union and industrial union? ----- ----- -----

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### 9.7 MERITS AND DEMERITS OF TRADE UNION

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#### 9.7.1 Merits

##### 1. Employment Security -

The risk of stability and secured employment is very high in any workplace. A person alone may not be able to fight for her/his rights and the employer alone does not have the capacity to secure the rights of her/his employees as it depends on various factors like the state of the market. As a result, it becomes necessary for political actions which could be facilitated by a union in case of elimination from the organisation in the form of discharge, dismissal, compulsory retirement, retrenchment etc.

##### 2. Negotiation and Rationalisation:

It is the duty of every trade union to promote economic security and improve the labour-management relationship through constant negotiations and rationalisation. The economic security depends on the management's personnel policies of retirement, promotion; transfer etc. so all these policies should be governed by rational policies and statutory rules. Even the grievances of the workers should be negotiated through appropriate means which becomes the responsibility of the entire union.

### **3. Promoting Equality and Industrial Democracy:**

One of the important features of democracy is a periodical election which is also done in any trade union to select its executive members/ leaders. This provided a scope for the grassroots workers to participate in the process of making any decision in the organization indirectly which in return empowers them. It also helps an employee of the lower rank to become an office bearer and participate in any form of collective bargaining which ultimately helps in achieving industrial democracy, equity and peace.

### **4. Legislative Enactments:**

The main aim of the trade union remains to get legal sanctions for their demands in the form of Acts so that those can be made a permanent feature of the contract between labour and management. To achieve this purpose, the trade union takes steps for the recourse of political actions either through forming their own political party or through the support of any other political party.

### **5. Social Security and Physical Security:**

The utmost important feature of a trade union is to provide a safe/suitable physical work environment, thus preserve the health and safety of the workers through their adherence to safety provisions and policies. Apart from that, a trade union is also responsible to provide a peaceful retired life to its employees so it also tries to provide adequate benefits of retirement. To achieve this, the union pressurizes the employers to contribute for regular and adequate statutory funds which are meant to protect the future well-being of its employees. The organizational-level schemes may also be made for improving the retirement benefits to the employees.



## **9.7.2 Demerits**

### **1. Uneven Growth:**

The activities of a trade union could be seen more concentrated in large scale industrial sector. Their activities run around manual labour rather than small scale enterprises, domestic and agricultural labour. The formation, activities and growth of these unions could be seen in bigger industrial centres like the textile workers of Bombay, Ahmedabad, Indore, Tamil Nadu etc. As a result of which, the growth and protection of the rights of the workers in the small scale industries are dropping at a high rate.

### **2. Multiplicity of Union:**

It so happens sometimes that we can see the creation of a lot of small unions in one plant. This happens because of the Trade Union Act of 1926 which permits any association of seven workers to be registered as a union and confers upon it certain rights. As a result of which, the ideology of superiority, creates a clash between these unions, forbidding them to achieve their ultimate goal of protecting the rights of the workers.

### **3. Financial Crises:**

The financial positions of the trade unions are often low and weak, firstly because of the low rate of subscription rate (membership fee) and secondly for subscription dues. The reason behind the low rate of subscription rate is the multiplicity of unions. The unions keep their rate of subscription low to increase their rate of membership which finally results in a low collection of funds.

### **4. Low Welfare Schemes:**

The trade union focuses more on creating economic and social protection rather than welfare schemes. They work hard on issues like an increase in wages and allowances rather than creating welfare facilities like educational facilities or medical facilities. Limited welfare schemes lead to lower participation of workers in trade unions.

## **5. Lack of Public Support:**

The trade unions frequently resort to measures like strikes and demonstrations. They give limited attention to peaceful and non – violent methods for the settlement of demands and disputes. The general public is affected due to strikes as a result of which they lose the interest or support of the public. Sometimes, therefore, the opinions of the trade unions may be inimical to the general public opinion.

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## **9.8 SUMMING UP**

In this unit, we have learned about the evolution of the trade union in India in its various phases. We are introduced to trade unions like All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), AIBEA, ILO, etc. The meaning and need for such trade unions and the demerits of the trade unions in India have also been discussed.

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## **9.9 QUESTIONS**

1. What is meant by Trade Union? Give some definitions.
2. Explain the history/growth of the trade unions in India?
3. Discuss the characteristics of a trade union.
4. Explain the classification of the trade union in India.
5. Discuss the merits and demerits of the trade union in India.

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## **UNIT 10: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA: NATIONALITY AND SUB-NATIONALITY MOVEMENTS**

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Objectives
- 10.3 Nationalist Movement
- 10.4 Sub-nationalist Movement
- 10.5 Summing up
- 10.6 Questions
- 10.7 Recommended Readings and References

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### **10.1 INTRODUCTION**

There have been many studies and debates on the nature of social movements. Several social movements have taken place in the past, new social movements are taking place now as discussed in the previous units. In analysing the tradition of a social movement, it is very important to understand it in relation to social change and social structure.

Social change, as we know by now, does not take place merely by chance or due to some factors predetermined by fate. There are several forces operating simultaneously in society, which bring about change. Social movements are one of these internal forces, which contribute to changes. Social movements are collective action by large groups of people which is directed towards changing some of the values, norms and social relations in society but which are spontaneous and sustained. This collective attempt is not only to promote change but also to resist change. One important feature

has to be kept in mind that not all social movements attempt to change the existing situations.

As discussed extensively in the earlier units social movements can be classified under various typologies depending on such factors like aim of the movement, organisation, means adopted to achieve the aims, value strength and so on. Some of the types are Migratory movements, Reform movements, Revolutionary movements and Resistance or Reactionary movements.

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.

Since the late eighteenth century, the nationalist movements have been one of the world's most powerful agents of social change. James Goodman (2010) in his article 'Nationalism as a Social Movement' stated that "as a social movement, nationalism serves as a primary instrument both for popular aspiration and for ruling ideology. It is embedded in political contexts and can only be explained in relation to the resulting dynamics of contention".

Sub-nationalism, on the other hand, is the policy of asserting of one's own state/region/province from the interest of the nation and the common interest of all other states/regions/provinces. Sub-nationalism can be defined or belongs to a generic category where the aspirations of a particular community within a nation express their identity in different forms rather than only being Indian. According to S.K. Mitra (1995), the phenomenon of sub-national movements are a special type of ethnonational movement and it is within the larger framework of the challenge of state formation and nation building in multi-ethnic, post-colonial states.

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## **10.2 OBJECTIVES**

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After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Explain the concept and nature of nationalist movement and sub-nationalist movements in India;
- Discuss how these movements challenge the territory or the formation of states and nation building process;
- Analyse the issues and problems in the study of nationalist and sub-nationalist movements.

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## **10.3 NATIONALIST MOVEMENT IN INDIA**

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There is considerable debate over types of nationalist movements in India and its role in Indian history. Studies on the issues of nation and nationalism have great significance in the contemporary globalized era. The notion of nationalism and national identity are seen as elements which create contradictions in the governmental structure of the present nation-state.

According to James Goodman (2010), nationalist movements have been the most powerful forces for social change. As a social movement, nationalism serves as a primary instrument both for popular aspiration and for ruling ideology, also that it is embedded in political contexts.

The nationalist movements can be distinguished from other social movements or non-nationalist movements in terms of the commitment towards the belief of nationalist ideology. As inferred from the earlier units that ideology distinguishes one social movement from one another, even though the goals of both may be similar.

The nationalist movements in India was an organized mass movement which brought different sections of people concerning varied interests into one political

unity. In other words, we can also say that the nationalist movement is a social and political movement that bring people together in maintaining national identity and autonomy, being nation.

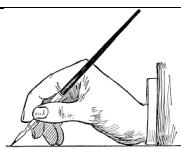
The prominent leaders of the nationalist movement in India were Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai, V.O Chidambaram Pillai, Sri Aurobindo, Surendranath Banerji, Rabindranath Tagore. In the history of the nationalist movement in India, for instance, the Swadeshi movement was the most successful economic strategy to remove the British empire and improve the economic conditions in India. Strategies of the swadeshi movement involved boycotting British products and the revival of domestic products and production processes. Another example to cite is the Non-cooperation movement, which was started under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, marking a new awakening in the Indian independence movement. After a series of events including the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, Gandhiji realised that there was no prospect of getting any fair treatment at the hands of British, so he planned to withdraw the nation's co-operation from the British Government, thus launching the Non-Cooperation Movement and thereby led to the imbalance of the administrative set up of the country. This movement was a great success as it got massive encouragement to millions of Indians. This movement almost shook the British authorities.

Scholars like Ernest Geller have viewed nationalism as rooted in the transformation of the world from agrarian to industrial. (Mishra, 2009). The moderate nationalist argued that the British rule was responsible for the ruin of the Indian economy and was blocking the possibilities of economic development of India along modern lines. It was these ideas that shaped the background of this popular national movement in the 20th century. The leaders took these ideas to the people and mobilized them against anti-imperialist struggle.

Indian nationalism was basically an ideology, a set of idea or belief which acted to hold the national unity. If we try to understand the situation in India before 1858, there was a relative absence of the idea of the nation. But when we look at

the period of British rule, we see the growth of nationalism took place. Even without a politically unified territory, many factors combined and gave the country an identity of oneness. The major task for the independence movement was not merely to attain political independence from the British rule but also to develop a modern nation-state. In other words, nationalism is closely related to modernity and industrial capitalism. As discussed, India in the nineteenth century, was not a nation in its fullest terms, rather it was a nation in the making. The series of the nationalist movement in India has a huge contribution over Britain's ever scarred grip over its Raj system, faced with a magnitude of issues, mass Movements that attributed to but were not solely responsible for India's independence in 1947.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What are the movements associated with the nationalist movement in India? How did those challenge the nation building process on India?

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#### Stop and Read

**State-** The state is a political association, which is characterized by territorial jurisdiction, a more or less non-voluntary membership, a set of rules which define the rights of its members by way of a constitution and claims to legitimacy of power over its members.

**Nation-** The term refers to a group of people who have developed solidarity on the basis of common identity of culture religion, language and state etc. The national identity of any group, which



defines itself as such, may be based on any number of criteria, such as the place of residence, ethnic origin, culture religion, language.

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#### **10.4 SUB-NATIONALIST MOVEMENT**

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What is sub-nationalism? In simple words, in the context of India, sub-nationalism can be defined as a socio-political movement, where the aspirations of a particular community within a nation express their identity in different forms apart from being only Indian. In India, we can observe the re-emergence of sub-nationalism as a political idea. Various instances of such phenomenon can be cited from various political struggles that are going on in mainstream India.

One of the sub-national movements in South India is the Telangana Movement. It is also considered as a type of ethnonational movement, a movement that challenged the larger framework of state formation and nation- building of India. The supporters of such movements belong to a particular region having a particular language, religion, ethnicity, also a sense of collective grievance. Movements, like these, question the character of the nation and the state where they feel ruled out of their own living space. Subnational movements are political movements that arise from a blend of identity and material interests. The agitation for a separate Telangana state that was carved out of Andhra Pradesh, was the outcome of the first sub-national movements in India. Other major sub national movements in India, those that led to the creation of states like Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Orissa.

Another recent sub-national movement to mention is the Gorkhaland movement. The Gorkhaland movement is a classic sub-nationalist movement, with roots dating back over a century. It is a long-standing quest for a separate State of Gorkhaland within India for Nepali-speaking Indian citizens, who are often known as Gorkhas. This particular movement is neither separatist nor anti-nationalist rather by demanding Gorkhaland, the people of Darjeeling-Kalimpong are opting out of West

Bengal's domination, and opting into the democratic frameworks of India writ large.

### **Stop and Read**

About Gorkhas:

Gorkhas or (Gurkhas) are Nepali origin people who take their name from the 8th century Hindu warrior-saint Guru Gorakhnath and from the Nepal hill town of Gorkha. In India, the word is sometimes used to make a distinction between Indian Gorkhas, who are citizens of India, and Nepali citizens who are living in India.

In a notification issued on August 23, 1998, the Home Ministry clarified that 'Gorkhas domiciled in India at the time of commencement of the Constitution, and those born in India, or born to one or both parents born in India, are citizens of India'.

Why did they demand Gorkhaland? The reason which is generally observed and is common to almost all of such movements is the factor of ethnic differences. The people belonging to this area have hardly any connection with the Bengali community and are different in ethnicity, culture and language. Due to racial discrimination, they are treated as foreigners. Also, the imposition of Bengali language by the state government is seen as an extension of histories of domination and a threat to their identity. Therefore they seek a separate identity within the Indian dominion.

To understand better, let us see the background of the history of the Gorkhaland movement. In 1780, the Gorkhas captured Sikkim and most part of North Eastern states including Darjeeling in 1780. After 35 years of rule, the Gorkhas surrendered the territory to British in the Treaty of

Segoulee in 1816, after they lost the Anglo-Nepal war. However, though the British handed over Darjeeling to Sikkim, it was taken back for political reasons in 1835. Before 1905, when Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon directed the partition of Bengal, Darjeeling was a part of Rajshahi division, which now falls in Bangladesh. For a short period from 1905-1912, it was even a part of the Bhagalpur division. Darjeeling was merged with West Bengal after the partition of 1947. All India Gorkha League began a movement for a separate state in 1949.

India has also witnessed such movement in Karnataka, where the main issue was regarding a separate state flag for Karnataka. Though it did had an unofficial yellow and red flag from almost 50 years, the government started considering adopting an official state flag. The second issue was the protest against the imposition of Hindi, particularly on the signboards of Namma Metro stations in Bengaluru. There was a huge revolt against the use of Hindi signboards in the metro.

As Subrata K Mitra stated that “Once the values espoused by a sub-nationalist movement are accommodated within the political arena - either through the creation of a new autonomous territory or through their constitutional recognition within the framework of the national state - the normal politics of 'who gets what and how' replaces the complex interplay of transactional (material benefits) and transcendental (values, identity, community and dignity) issues. Cultural identity is unlikely to have the same political salience that it had prior to the attainment of power in a state that is created out of a successful sub-nationalist movement” (Mitra,1995).

“The following factors are sufficient to help transform the sentiments of cultural nationalism into a political movement for a separate homeland:

1. Weakening central rule.
2. Geopolitical conditions are helpful to separatists such as the expression of symbolic or material support by neighbouring countries and an international climate favourable to their cause.

3. A social network that can be transformed into a political organisation capable of facilitating coordination among sub-nationalist leaders, generating symbolic and material support for the “cause” and acting as a vigilante organisation to punish defectors.

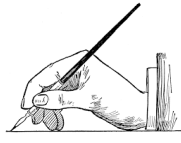
These factors are additive; that is, the probability of growth in sub-nationalism is highest when several factors cumulate, whereas the probability is lower when some of the factors are absent” (Mitra, 1995)

Sub-nationalism, if emphasized aggressively on its regional identities, the regional aspirations become too strong. For example, as a country who has faced partition due to rising religious motives and who has been afflicted by secessionist movement in Jammu and Kashmir and Nagaland based on regional identities, both the states have sacrificed and have given a lot of efforts to keep the nation intact. Therefore, in granting a state flag to a particular state is always debatable and controversial.

On the contrary, Prerna Singh (2015) in her work on *How Solidarity Works for Welfare: Subnationalism and Social Development in India* has taken an optimistic stand towards sub-nationalism in India. She argued that sub-nationalism encourages social development. She demonstrates through her multiple research works that if the level of solidarity is high in a state, so is the state’s commitment towards its social welfare. It means that a region becomes more and more dedicated to its work in the state if it is able to freely express, profess and promote its cultural and linguistic identity within its country. She uses the case studies of Kerala and Tamil Nadu against the Uttar Pradesh to prove her point.

In a nutshell, we can see how the nature of sub-nationalism in India is diverse in many ways. It is in fact seen from both negative and positive perspectives. On one hand, it creates conflicts, attacks, towards a nation, while on the other hand, it acts as a binding factor which keeps holding a nation intact.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Write few examples of sub-nationalist movement of Northeast of India?

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### 10.5 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we learned the nature of the nationalist movement and sub-nationalist movements in India and how are they different from each other in terms of their ideologies. Also, we discussed the various movements, as such, that emerged in multiple states in India and how it challenged the nation-building process of India. Nationalist movement and sub-nationalist movement, both differ in its nature and the structural elements that it constitutes. But the impact of both movements can be felt in a wider sense. India from time of its freedom struggle has been a pluralist society, based on different ethnic, religious or linguistic group to express their aspirations in whichever way possible.

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### 10.6 QUESTIONS

1. What do you understand by Social Movement? How social movements differ from other movements?
2. Is ideology an essential component of a social movement? Illustrate your answer with suitable examples from some contemporary social movements.
3. Discuss the nature of nationalist movement in India? What are its implications in the aftermath of such a movement?

4. What is sub-nationalist movement? Discuss its nature with reference to contemporary examples.
5. With reference to any sub-nationalist movement that happened in India, discuss the nature and the consequences of such movement?

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## **MODULE IV: NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA**

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## **UNIT 11: NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA: WOMEN'S MOVEMENT**

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

11.1 Introduction

11.2 Objectives

11.3 Feminism, Women's Studies and Women's Movement

11.4 Women's Movement in India: Early years

11.5 Women's Movement in Post-independent India

11.6 Summing up

11.7 Questions

11.8 Recommended Readings and References

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### **11.1 INTRODUCTION**

Two hundred years ago women held very few rights and most did not have access to inheritance, education or participation in the decision-making process. The state of women's rights was poor with no laws existing that would give them equal rights as men. It was a long road for women's rights and liberation movement and it was by the second half of nineteenth-century that women and men across the world started the conversation around equality and emancipation of women.

In this unit, we shall primarily focus on the women's rights movement in India. The essay will trace the origins and history of the movement to its contemporary times and focus on the debates that have transformed and shaped the movement. The unit will also discuss the role of larger feminist thought and the women's studies in shaping these movements for equality of movement as the three cannot be understood individually.



In the past decade, the restructuring of neoliberalist policies has caused massive changes in political and economic institutions particularly labour (organised and unorganised), and collective goods such as housing, welfare systems, health, and education. The resultant escalation of gender gap through the rise of poverty, alienation, marginalization and violence has once again brought the issue of women, their rights over their labour and body thus pushing the need for a redefinition of feminist thought and its practice, and to challenge patriarchal politics. While the feminist theory has been largely derived from women's activism, the challenge lies in its application to organising movement and its analysis (Motta et.al, 2011). Thus, powerful activist movements of environmental concerns, anti-globalisation, trade unions that involve a huge proportion of women would find feminist arguments as inadequate. This has been further complicated by the long association of feminist academia with the white, bourgeoisie, liberal perspective. Nevertheless, theories on feminism have classified the movement on the basis of the dominant ideology, or organisation, or goals. Citing Omvedt, Shah (2001) classifies women's movements into two types: (1) women's equality movements; and (2) women's liberation movements. The former aims at challenging the exploitative characteristics of feudal patriarchy. Much of the equality movements is about attaining equal position for women within the existing structure. The latter directly challenge the sexual division of labour itself, advocating absolute freedom for women. They fall under the broad definition of "radical feminism" (Randall, 1987). Despite the criticism of the broad categorisation of the feminist movement, the popular assertion has been towards the idea that the Western feminism has broadly been through several "waves", with each period representing different aims and goals. The first wave feminism which roughly includes the latter part of the 19th and early 20th century primarily focused on women's suffrage. It started as promotion of women's right to property and against ownership of (married) women by their husbands. By the end of the 19th century, the movement shifted the focus

to political rights, with special emphasis on women's right to vote. The Suffragettes in Britain carried on the campaign for the cause. The second wave feminism of the 1960s -1980s broadened its focus to incorporate issues of gender norms and labour. One of the influences of this period was the work of French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir- *The Second Sex* (1949) that questioned women's oppression and the societal construction of women as the 'other' sex.

Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) criticised the association of roles of nurturing and motherhood to women and as the only source of fulfilment. The third wave (1990s-2000s) worked on the perceived failures of the preceding wave. Feminists debated on notions of sexuality, marginalisation of women of colour and minorities, as well as definitions of femininity. Each of these waves has been linked to broader ideologies of liberal, socialist, and radicalism, each describing the problem of patriarchy in fairly different terms and thus calling for correspondingly distinctive strategies for social change.

### Stop and Read

#### Definitions

**Gender gap:** It refers to the measure of levels of inequality between women and men. It is measured by four indicators- economic participation, level of education, health and survival, and political empowerment.

**Gender order:** It is the ways in which societies shape notions of masculinity and femininity into power relationships. The gender order of any society incorporates its own socio-cultural notions of sex, gender, gender identity, gender roles, and finally gender performance.

**Gender stratification:** It refers to a society's unequal distribution of wealth, power and privilege between the sexes. Gender stratification

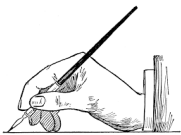
in our societies is dominantly shaped by patriarchy, a form of social organisation in which men dominates, oppress and exploit women, and sexism.

**Feminism:** It is the advocacy of social equality for the sexes, in opposition to patriarchy and sexism. Despite the variations within it, feminism incorporates within its ideology certain basic goals- a) the importance of change, i.e. feminism is critical of the status quo, b) expanding human choice, i.e. challenging the binaries of masculinity and femininity and its associated (unequal) normative structure, c) eliminating gender stratification, d) ending sexual violence, and e) promoting sexual autonomy, i.e. advocates women's control of their sexuality and reproduction.

The main strands of feminism as located above have usually been seen as 'Western' and have sometimes been in conflict with the aims of women from low-income or Third world societies. It is a fact that in developing nations, women are responsible for more than 50 per cent of all food production. Yet almost half of all single women over age fifteen are mothers, are poor, starving, and illiterate. Women are not only the caretakers of the elderly but are also the majority of the elderly of the world. The abuse of children is a women's problem because women must bear responsibility for children in virtually all cultures, and also because it is mostly female children who are abused—nutritionally, educationally, sexually, psychologically, etc. Women and children constitute more than 90 per cent of all refugee populations. Degradation of environment caused by corporations' industrial waste, chemical warfare, pesticides etc have taken a toll on the female reproductive system, and in miscarriages, stillbirths, and congenital deformities. Thus, feminist thought and in extension women's movement, today has a double role of addressing larger and more complex issues that unify the betterment of society as a whole.

In the following section, we shall learn about the relationship between feminism, women's studies and women's movement.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	1. What is feminism?
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2. How is gender gap related to gender stratification?	
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### 11.2 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall try to understand the different phases of the women's movement in India and the historical context within which they occurred. By the end of the chapter, you are expected to be able to:

- Explain the meaning of feminism;
- Trace the history of women's movement and in particular, women's rights movement in India;
- Analyse the nature of the women's movement in challenging gender stratification.

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### 11.3 FEMINISM, WOMEN'S STUDIES AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN INDIA

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Women's movement in India comprises of organisations that have been trying to conserve the traditional position of women, as well as those that have questioned and attempted to change them. The plural nature of the movement puts India in a unique position in addressing issues of women. Crucial in the development of the movement is the role of women's studies. The literature by women's studies has provided valuable theoretical and philosophical expression on posing relevant questions for in-depth studies on the structure of Indian social system in general and women's position within it (Shah, 2014). While the scholarly work of women or women's writings goes as far back as 600 BCE, the role of the social reform movement during the freedom struggle has been pivotal (John, 2008; Mazumdar, 1994). However, it is the political and economic crisis of the 1970s and the subsequent *Towards Equality* Report (1975), a report undertaken by the Committee on the Status of Women in India, Government of India, Ministry of Education and Social Welfare that showed the abysmal condition of a vast majority of women in the country. The Committee was guided by a few principles that later reflected the goals of women studies in India. Some of these were- equality as a basic condition, improvement in economic opportunities, recognition of the contribution of household work in the economy of the nation, etc (Mazumdar, 1994). The study concluded that the exclusion and marginalization of women in legal-economic and political affairs, declining sex ratio, poor education and literacy rate questioned the constitutional guarantees of gender equality (John, 2008). The report, however, redefined the agenda of women's studies, which emerged in a new form with the initiative of Indian Social Science Research. According to Mazumdar (1994), the new role of women's studies was to:

- (1) to identify and work for needed policy changes; (2) to persuade the social science community to re-examine the methodology, concepts, theories, and analytical apparatus of social which had

successfully excluded women's role, status, from the entire arena of social investigations; and (3) to revive the social debate on the women's question, which had major issue during the freedom struggle but had faded post-Independence period. (p.43)

Women's studies thus contributed to the growth of women's movement post-1970s. Not only did it provide dynamism to the movement, but the new and larger body of information helped to draw more women from different backgrounds as well as broaden the concerns beyond the disciplinary boundaries of social sciences i.e., division of research into economics, history, politics, sociology etc. Not only did women studies highlight the significance of interdisciplinary and critical approach but also critiqued the Western concept of value-free social sciences and academic neutrality. Women's movement in India was thus able to challenge the western conceptualization of modernisation and development and the dichotomies of traditional, rural societies in the Third World versus modern, urban societies of developed nations.

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#### **11.4 WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN PRE-INDEPENDENT INDIA: SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENT AND FREEDOM STRUGGLE**

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The movement for women's rights in India has a long history that can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century's mass struggles against British colonial rule in the 1920s to 1940s (Desai, 1985). The social reform movement of 19<sup>th</sup> century was a critical appraisal of Indian society in an attempt to create a new society devoid of all overt social aberrations like polygamy, casteism, enforcement of celibate and ascetic widowhood, *sati*, child marriage, illiteracy etc. thus pushing the colonial government to enact laws to change the structure. Social reformers like Rammohan Roy, Jyoti Rao Phule, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Dayanand Saraswati, Govind Ranade, Behramji Malbari, all became pioneers of the progressive movement that shared common concerns against social evils. These men, drawn mostly from a new urban elite, influenced by the Enlightenment

philosophies, saw the traditional barbaric practices as a lapse in the progress of the society and saw women's emancipation as a necessity in society's regeneration. Thus, *sati* came to be abolished in 1829, followed by legalisation of widow remarriage in 1856, ending the gender seclusion, i.e. *purdah* through the introduction of western formal education; women eventually were thus drawn into the public sphere, political participation and employment.

Apart from reformers, several organizations were instituted that actively addressed social issues. The All India Women's Conference (AIWC) and Women's Indian Association were formed in the early part of the twentieth century primarily to discuss women's education. But it was soon realised that without addressing larger issues of social problems like dowry, child marriage etc. women's education would never be achieved. Several groups and associations like Bharat Ashram (Indian Hermitage) in Bengal, Arya Mahila Samaj (The Aryan Women's Association) in Bombay, Bharat Mahila Parishad (Ladies' Social Conference), formed as part of the National Social Conference in 1905; and Anjuman-e-Khawatin-e-Islam (The Muslim Women's Association) in Punjab were also significant. There were however problems with these associations; most of them were initiated or inspired by men. These associations were also mostly representative of women belonging to the elite urban background. Thus, they faced issues when a) women attempted to redefine "women's issues and questions", and b) addressing concerns of women from less privileged sections. Reformers, as well as the organizations, were highly criticised for not altering the social structure itself and the unequal power dynamics, but rather only focusing on reforming women. Only a small group of elite women became the beneficiaries of new modernity who were able to negotiate patriarchal spaces to access education, employment and political leadership. The emphasis on high-caste and upper-class norms meant that most women were left out of the benefits of modernity and deprived of their traditional rights and freedoms. Several factors such as caste

ideology, joint family system, the practice of *purdah* system, etc. impeded women's participation in the public sphere and kept them secluded from men. These factors shaped the goals of early women's movement leaders who focussed basically on improving women's performance of traditional female roles such as of householder, wife, etc. Liberal ideas, such as achieving equal rights as men, were not a part of their agenda. In spite of its limitations, these organisations and associations helped in removing prejudices against women's education and provided a space for women in the public realm. Through their collective efforts, the Child Marriage Bill (1927) was passed, thereby raising the minimum age for women and men to be married.

It was the return of Gandhi and his participation in the struggle for freedom that brought further involvement of women from beyond the upper and middle class elite. The first feminist movement peaked during this phase, in 1920s-30s women mobilizing themselves on issues of civil rights and social reform. Both Indian National Congress and Gandhi sought linkages from peasant, workers and women organization for mass support. The Swadeshi movement and Partition of Bengal (1905) in particular attracted a large number of rural women. While women were often participants in the INC conferences (mostly as observers), the new turn in freedom struggle also brought in a new kind of feminine political role. Women could effectively use their traditional role to mask political activities. All their revolutionary acts were covered under the mask of their conventional domestic roles. Gandhi too extended this metaphor of 'feminine' protests by using traditional idioms and roles while questioning and condemning customs like *sati*, dowry and *purdah* which the limited involvement of women in the national awakening. He drew a huge number of women into the movement thereby legitimising the claims the politics of INC and India's unity. The INC committed itself to women's rights as part of the civil rights, and the violence against women political activists help bolster the fight against alien rule particularly in the Civil Disobedience Movement



and the *Satyagraha*. While Gandhi saw women as active and conscious agents of social change, and not helpless individuals who needed reforms, his political idiom which drew largely from Hindu icons (Damayanti, Sita etc) limited the involvement of Muslim women.

Very few women, such as Pritilata Waddedar and Kalpana Dutta, were exceptions who joined the struggle as revolutionaries. Radical women revolutionaries were seen in the 1940s among early communists who questioned segregation, discriminatory sexual morality, as well as the institution of marriage. Few Gandhians like Sarala Devi, Amrit Kaur and Muthulaksmi Reddy remained committed to civil rights for women led a separate women's Congress. Thus, by 1940s the urgency of women's agenda and hegemony of the organizations eroded. With growing communalism and subsequent partition, women's participation was significant in the nationalist movement but was drawn towards socio-economic justice of the society (e.g. Tebhaga movement in North Bengal, the Telangana movement in Andhra Pradesh, and the cotton textile workers' movements in western India) and women's issues were sidelined. The first phase of the women's movement thus saw it overlapping with nationalism. Yet it would be wrong to sideline the efforts and the consequences of the mobilization during the era. Women's activism was not confined to women's agenda alone. Their active participation was also seen in tribal, students, peasants movement, thus, questioning the invisible participation of women (Shah, 2001).

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### **11.5 WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN POST-INDEPENDENT INDIA**

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Post independent India saw far-reaching transformations in socio-judicial reforms. For example, Article 14 and 16 of the Constitution guaranteed the equality of sexes. In 1955-56 the section of the Hindu Code Bill was passed as the Hindu Marriage Act, Hindu Succession Act, etc. thereby regulating customary laws. The National Federation of Indian Women was formed in

1954 under the leadership of the Communist Party to fight against class wars. The developmental model of the new modernizing nation-state meant that aspiration towards empowerment was sidetracked for welfare mission of the community development programme. The failure of government policies eventually led to several revolts in the 1960s (peasant movements, Self-Employed Women's Association, anti-price-rise agitation through the United Women's Anti-Price Rise Front in Kolkata, Bombay and Gujarat) which in turn led to further fragmentation of the women's organisation. Moreover, the leading organisations like AIWC took a political position which was also consistent with the broad framework of the social feminism wherein the idea of equality was based on the importance and value of women's traditional roles.

The second phase in the 1970s and 80s saw a revival in women's movement due to two major factors- the UN declaration as 1975-85 as the International Women's Decade and as a result of it the Committee on the Status of Women was set up in India. The period witnessed women related activism by feminist groups as well as political parties such as Purogami Stree Sangathan (Progressive Women's Association), and Stri Mukti Sangathan in Bombay, Mahila Samata Sainik Dal by Dalit groups, and the CPI (M) formed the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) in 1981. As mentioned before, the *Equality Report* exposed the poor condition of women and revealed the shortcomings of the modernisation process, the invisibility of women in most sectors and the growing gender gap in all demographic indicators such as life expectancy; literacy etc. The decade was also a turning point in Indian politics with the populist regime of Indira Gandhi and the subsequent declaration of National Emergency in 1975. The new autonomous organisation emerged across the nation particularly questioning the rising violence against women. The Mathura rape case in 1972, for instance, took on a national character through the countrywide protests against the custodial rape of the young tribal girl in question. Along with this, cases of dowry deaths and 'bride burnings' were

also taken up by new movement. This led to an amendment of rape law and changes in the Evidence Act, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Indian Penal Code. The 'atrocities against women' headline, attracted media attention to the trauma women undergo in their own homes and family, which had so often been labelled as the foundation of Indian society. The campaigns such as those of Dahej Virodhi Chetna Manch (DVCM) in Delhi, changed the Section 498-A, which encompassed for the first time a definition of cruelty which included not just physical but mental cruelty as well. Violence against women began even at the level of reproductive rights. When news of medical businesses, who openly advertised for sex-determination by referring to daughters as 'liability', came in from Punjab, the horrors of increasing cases of female foeticide and infanticide came to light. In 1985, The Forum against Sex- Determination and Sex-Pre-Selection (FASDSP) was formed in Bombay which eventually came to be passed in the centre in 1994.

The increasing attacks on women in a highly charged political environment was also another concern. With waves of fundamentalist xenophobia, women were the common victims in any communal riots. Further, rape and other atrocities inflicted on women and others in Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, Tripura, Punjab or Kashmir by the armed or para-military forces also came under focus (Mazumdar, 1994). But the biggest challenge to women's movement came from the Uniform Civil Code controversy which was strategically used for communal politics. The Code, based on egalitarian principles, was introduced immediately after independence by Ambedkar and Nehru as a step towards secularisation and modernisation in order to minimise the influence of Hindu Civil Code. However, it was perceived as an attack on personal laws, which flows primarily from religious affiliation and local customs and which defined the relationship between women and men in matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance, maintenance, guardianship, and succession. Personal laws are thus different from civil laws and are different for four communities-Hindus, Muslims,

Christians and Parsis. The Shah Bano judgement (1985) showed the weakness of women's movement and of the progressive section to mobilize for all communities and to bring women's issues out of the domain of religion. But more than that, it highlighted the communal attitude of the Indian state which emboldened the fundamentalist in all groups. Thus, Agnihotri and Mazumdar (1995) rightly points out that

“In contemporary India the resurgence of the women's movement and its contours have to be seen in the light of: (I) The crisis of state and government in the 70s going into the emergency; (2) the post-emergency upsurge in favour of civil rights; (3) the mushrooming of women's organisations in the early 1980s and the arrival of women's issue on the agenda; (4) the mid-1980s, marked by a fundamentalist advance; and the 1990s, when the crisis has deepened with regard to state, government and society” (pp.1869).

By the end of the second phase, several autonomous organizations and increasing significance of women's studies centres actively worked towards recognition of gender issues. The 1990s marked the liberation of the nation's economy, the anti-Mandal agitation, and the rise of caste-based political parties. Amidst this, women's movement continued through Dalit feminist movement of National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW), Dalit Mahila Samiti, who articulated the oppression faced by Dalit women by upper castes, upper class, and men of their own castes (Rege, 1998). The goal of political representation was also attempted when Constitution (Eighty-first) Amendment Bill, which sought to reserve for women one-third of the seats in Lok Sabha and state assemblies was introduced. However, the Women's Reservation Bill still remains to be passed in Lok Sabha. The 2000s saw, after decades of struggle, the actualization of Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act in 2005, Pre Conception and Pre Natal Diagnostic Technique Act (2002), and the Vishakha guideline which resulted in The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013. Feminist movement in India has also addressed the issue of hegemony of

globalisation, by stressing on the negative impact of the new economic policies on women .

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## 11.6 SUMMING UP

Women's movement in India spans more than a century with organisations that cover small to large issues. The movement has been through tensions, rift and contradictions on what constitutes women's issues. Women's resistance and mobilization, however, offers a better understanding and scope for building a better future for society. With the growing literature produced by various women's studies centres, organisations and associations, the movement is better equipped to deal with exclusion and violence despite ideological differences.

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## 11.7 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the meaning and significance of feminism and women's studies in rise of women's movement in India.
2. Explain the role of reform and struggle for freedom in shaping women's movement in India.
3. Write a note on the issues of women's movement in the post-independent India.

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## 11.8 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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## **UNIT 12: NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA: ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS**

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

12.1 Introduction

12.2 Objectives

12.3 Environmentalism and Environmental Movements in the World Context

12.4 Environmental Movements in India

12.5 Impacts of these Movements on the Indian Society

12.6 Role of UN in Environmental Protection

12.7 Summing Up

12.8 Questions

12.9 Recommended Readings and References

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### **12.1 INTRODUCTION**

Let us first learn about new social movements. The new social movement approach tries to relate social movements to large scale structural and cultural changes. Its proponents argue that movements have arisen in protest against increasing technocratic and bureaucratic political systems based on the prerogatives of material consumption. They also argue that the movements of the post-war era vary from those of the earlier period. This raises the needs of rethinking of theory as new movements fail to fit within the paradigm of either traditional Marxism or conventional academic understanding.

It can be referred to as a theory of social movements that address the larger umbrella of new movements that have come up mainly from the 1960s. Basically, these movements are claimed to carry a post-industrial nature in

them which is, in turn, claimed to be strikingly different from those of the industrial era. The primary goals of NSMs are issues specifically related to human rights such as gay right, environmental rights etc. Emphasis is largely put on social changes in identity, lifestyle and culture. Thus, we can see a shift from economic and political inclinations to that of culture. Examples of NSMs are environmental movements, gay rights movements, peace movements etc.

In this chapter, we shall learn about environmental movements in India. But before that, let us know a little about what environmental movements are. The environmental movement is a type of social movement that involves a chain of persons, groups, organisations and communities that have a common interest in environmental protection as well as in bringing about changes in environmental policies and practices. The movement is centred on the ideas of health, ecology and human rights because the proponents of this type of movement feel that all these are strongly interrelated. It is a global movement, where the world community fights for some common crucial causes as well.

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## **12.2 OBJECTIVES**

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By the end of the unit, you will be able to:

- Explain environmentalism and environmental movements in the world context;
- Describe the historical origin of environmental movements in India;
- Discuss on environmental movements in India;
- Analyse the role of UN on environmental protection.

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## **12.3 ENVIRONMENTALISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN THE WORLD CONTEXT**

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Environmentalism began in Europe in the early 19th century. It came into existence through the ideology of Romanticism, the latter prioritising on nature



and its appreciation. This approach challenged the hardcore, conventional scientific view that was held about nature till then. However, it is believed that ecological awareness appeared long ago, i.e., around 5000 years ago. Some of the earliest human narratives reflect the idea of how lessons were preached about the sacredness of the earth, wilderness and our moral duty to take care as well as nourish Mother Earth.

Environmentalism as a modern concept seeks to improve and protect the quality of our natural environment by different means, primarily being the adoption of effective policies and programmes through necessary and paramount government intervention. Environmental thought is strongly rooted in the polar ideas/camps of anthropocentrism or ‘human-centred’ and biocentrism or ‘life-centred’. The idea of shallow ecology is associated with the former while the latter is linked with what we call deep ecology. As we are more concerned about the ‘life-centred’ approach in link to this unit, we should know more about the idea of deep ecology. The phrase ‘deep ecology’ was first coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in 1973. Naess, in a 1972 presentation had discussed on the concern of the ecology movement about an ethic respecting nature.

The idea of ‘deep’ refers to the reflexive nature of moral questioning of our own actions towards nature. This is, thus, about the fundamental underpinnings. Environmentalism saw the first stronghold with the publication of *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson (2002). Published in 1962, this book documents the adverse impacts caused by the use of pesticides, on the environment.

Going to the background in the 19th and 20th centuries, we can find that the environmental movement grew strongly in Britain as a response to the Industrial Revolution. With no environmental regulations to stop them, the factories of the Industrial Revolution became causes of intensive environmental degradation. The Alkali Acts passed in 1863, were the first large-scale modern environmental laws. They were passed to regulate air pollution that was

increasing at an alarming rate. Moreover, the Coal Smoke Abatement Society was formed in 1898. It was one of the oldest environmental NGOs.

The movement in the United States of America started towards the late 19th century where individuals like John Muir and Henry David Thoreau made a significant philosophical contribution. Muir showed a keen interest in the formation of a national park and thus he successfully swayed the then Congress to form the Yosemite National Park. He also formed the Sierra Club in 1892. The 20th century saw the establishment of the National Park Service by US President Woodrow Wilson.

G. Shah (2014) discusses the various components of social movements. According to him, objectives, ideology, programmes, leadership and organization are important components of social movements. In the sphere of environmental movements, the most influential actors across the world are the environmental NGOs which are the primary policy instruments of the movement, the representatives of millions of citizens concerned about green issues.

#### **Stop and Read**

#### **VANDANA SHIVA—AN INDIAN WHO HAS MADE A NAME IN THE WORLD ENVIRONMENTAL PLATFORM**

Vandana Shiva is a renowned environmental scholar from India along with being an Indian physicist as well as a social activist. Having developed an interest in environmentalism in her childhood, Shiva started working on grassroots campaigns to prevent the felling of forests as well as the construction of dams. She was also a critique of the Green Revolution of the 1960s, claiming that it had led to a loss of indigenous diversity of seed and knowledge.

Some of her known works are *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature* (1997), *Tomorrow's Diversity* (2000), *Patents: Myth and Reality* (2001).

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## 12.4 A HISTORICAL ORIGIN OF ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

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India has shown a great traditional ethic of environmental consciousness as well as conscience. India is considered to be endowed with the oldest and most diverse environmental movement in Asia. An early record of a struggle of this kind in India is mentioned in the epic *Mahabharata*, where the clash between the Aryans, pastoralists and agriculturists, and the Nishads, forest-dwellers, resulted in the burning down of the Khandava-Vana which is the site of present-day Delhi. Also in the religious perspective, Indian religions are not anthropocentric and have emphasized crucially on the idea of non-violence (Ahimsa) and rights of animals of life as well as their compassionate treatment.

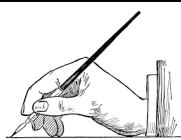
Modern environmental concerns, however, began with the arrival of the modern period. i.e., with the coming of the British. The advent of the British is remarkably distinguished in this perspective because of the drastic and rapid changes that they brought to the Indian lifestyle as well as the entire tradition of Indian life. For example, the advancement in the field of science and technology paved the way for the establishment of modern industries that saw an alteration in the way our natural resources were used. Processes of ruthless extraction and exploitation became common.

The environmental movement gained momentum with the exploitation of natural resources by the colonial rulers. The demands of the industrial revolution in Britain imposed new conditions in India. For example, the setting up of indigo plantations in Bengal and Bihar to feed the dye industry and the large-scale felling of trees in the sensitive mountain

ecosystems of the Western Ghats and the Himalayas to meet the requirements of the shipbuilding and railway industries. Such rapid changes brought by the White rulers to our nation. This led to local responses aimed to retain control over their natural resources, as they had significantly lost ownership to the colonisers. Forests are an important example of such exploitation as they came to be occupied by the British who in turn would determine their access and usage. This significantly had an impact on the forest dwellers and pastoralists.

In triggering the environmental concern, the role of the Indian intellectuals cannot be ignored. The contribution of intellectuals to the Indian environmental movement is worth mentioning. The legacy of the thoughts of minds like Mahatma Jotiba Phule had a profound impact. He prophesied about the people's right over the forest and the importance of the decentralized water harvesting systems. Environmental activists have throughout time relied heavily on the Gandhian philosophy of Satyagraha. Dr Ram Manohar Lohia was also one of the strong critiques against the construction of big dams and river-valley projects. His essays on these themes are relevant even today.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Elaborate on how environmental movements gained momentum in India during colonial rule.

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## 12.5 CLASSIFICATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

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The following classification style has been provided by Janki Andharia and Chandan Sengupta. Some of these categories are:

- a) Forest and land-based
- b) Marine resources and fisheries/ aquaculture
- c) Development projects

A movement from each category will be discussed below:

- 1) The Chipko Movement is the biggest example of the first category. Organised resistance to the destruction of forests spread across India in the 1970s which came to be known as the Chipko Movement –the name comes from the word ‘embrace’ because this movement was marked by the village communities hugging and embracing trees. They stood strong resisting the contractors from felling the trees down. It is said that the original Chipko movement was started by the Bishnois of Rajasthan in the early part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This community was led by Amrita Devi where groups of people from across villages gave up their lives in order to protect the trees from being felled down on the orders of the Maharaja of Jodhpur.

In 1973, the first Chipko movement took place in the village of Mandal in the upper Alaknanda Valley. It sparked off as a result of the government’s decision to allot a plot of forest area there to a sports good company. The women of the area went into the forests and severely protested against the move by circling around the trees and hugging them. They were led by activist Chandi Prasad Bhatt. This movement became very popular and its idea and message spread to the other parts of the country as well.

A famous slogan was coined during this movement,  
“What do the forests bear?  
Soil, water and pure air.”

Another important figure in this movement is Sunderlal Bahuguna whose appeal to the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi resulted in the green-felling ban. He had coined the famous slogan “Ecology is the permanent economy.” Indeed, the Chipko protests in Uttar Pradesh achieved a major success in 1980 as the PM ordered a 15-year ban on green felling in the Himalayan forests of that state. Not only that, but such a positive consequence was also felt in the Western Ghats and the Vindhyas.

- 2) Chilika Bachao Andolan in Orissa is a good example of the second category. It was a movement led mostly by the fishermen community in the state of Orissa. This community claims their fishing rights to the British period. They raised resistance to the Integrated Shrimp Farm Project in the 90s. This was a joint venture agreed upon mutually by TISCO and Government of Orissa. It was mainly a venture for intensive prawn cultivation and export. Naturally, this project was a severe threat to the livelihood of the fishing communities living around the historic lake. Hence the protest started.

The local people were also angered that the government had issued an order which divided the fisheries in Chilika into two categories of capture and culture which were not properly defined as well. Since the government did not lay down any definite guidelines for this operation, the Collector was free to act in his own whims. This policy further created confusion and conflict. The fishermen were apprehensive of the fact that their traditional rights would be curtailed by the Collector.

Taking together all these developments, this movement was hugely supported by the non-fishing community like the farmer class as well as by students, public intellectuals as well as human rights activists.

- 3) Narmada Bachao Andolan is the most powerful mass movement started in 1985 against the construction of a huge dam over river Narmada. The proposed dams called the Sardar Sarovar Dam and Narmada Sagar are huge costly projects which will displace around 3 lakhs of people. The river supports a large population who have settled in the area and thus are the local inhabitants there. If they are displaced, they will lose their habitat as their livelihood. The proposed project shall generate huge revenue for the government which is going to benefit only the power and money holders. The opponents have continuously voiced out how this project shall devastate thousands of human lives and biodiversity by causing destruction to large acres of forests and agricultural land.

Led by Medha Patkar as the 'Save Narmada Movement', the NBA over time has evolved into an international protest, garnering widespread support from the international community. Different national and international NGOs have extended their warm support to the cause. Different methods have been used by the protestors to disseminate their message, like mass media, hunger strike, rallies, marches and also through the filming of documentaries. One of the biggest demands of the protestors is that the World Bank withdraws its loan from the project (amounting to almost 450 million US dollar). The participants of the movement have also demanded alternative methods including decentralised methods of water harvesting as well as electricity production. NBA resistance

symbolises redefining the terms of development, democracy and accountability. The movement continues to attract a wide audience.

### **Stop and Read**

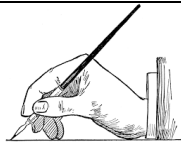
#### **THE SILENT VALLEY MOVEMENT**

It is a socio-environmental movement aimed at the protection and conservation of Silent Valley, an evergreen tropical forest in the Palakkad district of Kerala. It is a people's movement that saved the lush green Silent Valley from being destroyed/shattered by a hydroelectric project. The history goes that the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) proposed a hydroelectric dam across the Kuthipuzha river in that flows through Silent Valley. This would have led to a dangerous consequence, that is of the submerging of 8.3 sq. Km of untouched moist evergreen forest. Not only this, but it would also lead to harmful destructive measures like illegal wood felling, encroaching etc. affecting the Valley deeply.

It was Satish Chandra Nair who started a movement to create awareness in academia. Slowly and steadily such individual measures lead to widespread attention from both the national and international audience. It was a highly effective movement where people pressurised the government through every possible way— newspapers, seminars, awareness programmes etc. As time passed, the movement became stronger, more widespread and more popular. The result was that in January 1981, Indira Gandhi declared that Silent Valley would be protected. In Nov 1983, the project was called off and in 1985, PM Rajiv Gandhi formally inaugurated the Silent Valley National Park.



## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What are the central features of Chipko Movement?

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2. Critically analyse the causes, actions and consequences of the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

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### 12.6 ROLE OF UN IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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The United Nations plays a significant role in the protection, conservation and preservation of the environment. It is the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) that mainly coordinates the environmental activities of the organisation. It is a leading authority in the global environment. It was an outcome of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment which is also known as the Stockholm Conference. Founded in 1972 by Maurice Strong, the UNEP takes the responsibilities of dealing with environmental problems among UN agencies. It has played a crucial role in developing promoting environmental science and conservation, working towards policy-framing through cooperation and deliberation. It is also responsible for setting the global environmental agenda as well as providing leadership in contributing to creating a better world environment. It is headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya.

The Stockholm Conference is known to have produced the Stockholm Declaration which contains 26 principles concerning environment and development. Some of them have been mentioned below:

- 1) Human rights must be asserted, apartheid and colonialism condemned.
- 2) Natural resources must be safeguarded.
- 3) The Earth's capacity to produce renewable resources must be maintained.
- 4) Wildlife must be safeguarded.
- 5) Non-renewable resources must be shared and not exhausted.

In the 1980s, the United Nations set up the Commission on Environment and Development which is also known as the Brundtland Commission. It was named after its Chair Gro Harlem Brundtland. Its outcome was a seminal document entitled "Our Common Future" or Brundtland Report which defined sustainable development as which "meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs."

### **Stop and Read**

#### **THE RIO SUMMIT**

Another significant convention on the environment right after the Stockholm Conference is the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Also known as the Earth Summit/Rio Summit, its principal theme was "Environment and Sustainable Development". Some of the most notable resulting documents are The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Statement of Forest Principles, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Critically evaluate the role of the United Nations towards environmental causes.

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### 12.7 SUMMING UP

- Environmentalism began in Europe in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It came into existence through the ideology of Romanticism, the latter prioritising on nature and its appreciation.
- Environmentalism as a modern concept seeks to improve and protect the quality of our natural environment by different means, primarily being the adoption of effective policies and programmes through necessary and paramount government intervention.
- The phrase deep ecology was first coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in 1973. Naess in a 1972 presentation had discussed on the concern of the ecology movement about an ethic respecting nature. The idea of ‘deep’ refers to the reflexive nature of moral questioning of our own actions towards nature.
- The environmental movement grew strongly in Britain as a response to the Industrial Revolution.
- Modern environmental concerns, however, became more intense in the colonial period. The advent of the British is remarkably distinguished in this perspective because of the drastic and rapid changes that they brought to the Indian lifestyle as well as the entire tradition of Indian life.

- The environmental movement gained momentum with the exploitation of natural resources by the colonial rulers.
- Some of the most notable environmental movements in India are the Chipko Movement, the Narmada Bachao Movement, The Chilika Bachao Andolan and also the Silent Valley Movement.
- The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) coordinates the environmental activities of the organisation. It is a leading global environmental authority. It was an outcome of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment which is also known as the Stockholm Conference.
- The United Nations set up the Commission on Environment and Development which is also known as the Brundtland Commission. It was named after its Chair Gro Harlem Brundtland. Its outcome was a seminal document entitled “Our Common Future” or Brundtland Report.

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## 12.8 QUESTIONS

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1. Briefly argue on the significance of world environmentalism.
2. What is your understanding of deep ecology?
3. Give an account of the Silent Valley movement.
4. What is the significance of the Rio Summit? What were its outcomes?

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## 12.9 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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Official website of UN Environment

[www.uneenvironment.org](http://www.uneenvironment.org)

Official website of Dr. Vandana Shiva

[www.vandanashiva.com](http://www.vandanashiva.com)

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## **UNIT 13: NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA:**

### **MIDDLE CLASS MOVEMENTS**

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#### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

13.1 Introduction

13.2 Objectives

13.3 Defining a Class

13.4 The New Middle Class

13.5 The Middle Class Movement: Looking Historical Context

13.5.1 Post Independence Period

13.6 Middle Classes, Democracy and Electoral Politics

13.7 New Forms of Movement

13.8 Summing Up

13.9 Questions

13.10 Recommended Readings and Reference

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#### **13.1 INTRODUCTION**

Middle classes have always been an ambivalent category. It is because of its size, the propensity of mobility and a constant urge to maintain its middle-classness. Since its definition has been fluid, therefore, conceptualising and studying middle-class movements have been a relatively less researched field in sociology as compared to other types of social movements. In this regard, we would delve into some of the aspects which are crucial in understanding new middle-class movements. Pertaining questions such as what is class, middle class and the 'new' in the

middle class, this section would attempt to find answers to the crucial questions regarding middle-class movements.

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### **13.2 OBJECTIVES**

In this unit, we will attempt to look at the different aspects of tribal movements. By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the concept of class and middle class;
- Analyse the socio-historical context of the emergence of middle-class movements;
- Locate the new middle-class movements in the contemporary politico-social and economic scenario.

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### **13.3 DEFINING CLASS**

According to Max Weber, the market is the major determinant of life chances. Anthony Giddens in this regard argues that life chances are the chances that individuals have for sharing in the market, the socially created economic or cultural goods that exist in any given society or the chances that individuals have for gaining access to scarce and other socially valued outcomes. In his 'Class, Status and Party', Weber argues for a conception of social stratification which is more complex and diversified and within this, he conceptualizes the category of class. He looks at class in economic terms, yet argues that the actions of individuals and groups could not be understood exclusively in economic terms. In this context, he identifies three analytically distinct components of stratification: class, status and party. In Weber's opinion, class which is the economic variable is based on the relationship to the means of production. Classes refer to any group of people who are found in the same class situation which is determined by property or lack of it and it ultimately relates as the market situation. It is based exclusively on an economic interest which when shared by the members of the class leads to feelings of belongingness which gets translated into communal action. The diversity of assets that lead to

producing returns in the market leads to the creation of economic classes. These economic classes aggregate to form social classes. These social classes are formed on the basis of the market as well as factors like social mobility (Weber, 1978).

Weber identifies four major social classes such as the dominant entrepreneurial and propertied groups, the petty-bourgeois, workers with formal credentials (the middle class) and those who lack these credentials but have their labour power to offer at the market.

In this regard, Weber treated the middle classes as a modern category which exists as a material relationship and not as a mental disposition. The market economy operating through contract gave way to a distinct social pyramid. In between the top, aristocracy and the bottom working class was the 'middle' who were commercial or industrial capitalists. The emergence of a new middle class was due to the expansion of industrial capitalism and the rise of corporations. The new middle classes in the west expanded with the growth of the tertiary or the service sector.

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the middle class became a more generalised category with a distinct social identity. In this context, S. Jodhka identifies that the identity of the middle class is that of an everyman, the *aam admi* in India. The middle classes here evolved during the colonization by the British. The colonial middle class emerged out of the new educational system introduced by the British during the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This class was the class of *babus* (clerks) who were formed to help the colonial administrative affairs.

After the 1990s, there was a historical economic turn witnessed by India that fundamentally changed the orientation of the Indian economy. Neoliberal reforms raised the rates of economic growth. India opened its economy to global capitalists and gave access to foreign direct investment.



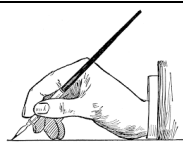
These middle classes were seen as important indicators of this growth. The imagination of the middle class had also changed into a population moving out of poverty and into a class of consumers. This population should have sufficient resources to spend on education, health care, leisure and travel, lifestyle etc. These middle classes are also incredibly seen in the private sector of the Indian economy (Jodhka & Prakash, 2016).

Besides, the expansion of the middle classes as a category is also associated with a subjective category of self-identification. This self-identification is more so in the urban areas. Being in the middle becomes important for many people. In the recent decade what becomes important is to tap on to the imagination and identities of the people who identify themselves in the category of the middle class. The educational and occupational indicators are important to map this trajectory of change within the category. In the early 1990s, the influence of the media was huge and it shaped middle-class identities and their notions of self-realisation and freedom (Jodhka & Prakash, 2016). Leela Fernandes looks at the new culture of consumption as one of the defining principles of middle-classness. The new middle classes' (NMC) primary concern is the self-making through the acquisition of a lifestyle. The economic liberalisation also translates to new aspirations for the middle classes (Fernandes & Heller, 2006).

The expansion of the middle class has undoubtedly created greater fluidity in social life, giving choice to individuals. But this choice hardly means emancipation from prejudice or social and economic dependencies. A new set of hierarchies are produced within this expansion of choices. The new culture offers possibilities of individual's social and symbolic mobility, the old boundaries of caste and communities do not disappear. Social networks still matter as they do not become irrelevant. These networks, in fact, condition hierarchies.

Thus, Leela Fernandes and Patric Haller argue that just relating NMC as a consumer-based group benefitting from economic reforms would oversimplify their relation to liberalization and also essentialises its internal coherence. The authors argue that NMC is a tangible phenomenon, whose boundaries are constantly being defined and tested. This can be understood by grasping class in practice, that is as a class defined by its politics and the very everyday practices through which it reproduces its privileged position. They argue that the upper middle classes were able to use their social connections and cultural capital, particularly their mastery of the English language, to capture the most lucrative jobs. But economic reforms often jeopardised the second and third tiers that is what Fernandes and Heller call as the lower middle class. The lower-middle-class young people often possess financial backing to obtain an education. But they lack the social connections and upper middle-class skills to succeed within the new economy (Fernandes & Heller, 2006).

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Define class.

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2. Fill up the blanks:

a. According to Max Weber, the \_\_\_\_\_ is the major determinant of life chances.

b. Leela Fernandes looks at the new culture of \_\_\_\_\_ as one of the defining principles of middle classness.

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### 13.4 THE NEW MIDDLE CLASS

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It is very well understood that the middle class in India is a complex group that is often difficult to define. It is a highly heterogeneous social category, differentiated not just by income, education, occupation, but also by caste, language, religion, age, gender, ethnicity, rural or urban location. Among the middle classes, not all social groups enjoy equal dominance. The hegemonic position is occupied by the "new middle-classes" who have come to embody India's transition to liberalization, the prosperous, young, metropolitan, invariably upper caste and Hindu, white-collared professionals. What defines them and differentiates them from others are their lifestyle, consumption and social distinctions. As contended by Nandini Gooptu, this section of the new middle class is the entrepreneurial class of doers who do not rely on the state for jobs, rather reposes their faith on the market (Gooptu, 2013).

However, there are large sections of middle classes who articulate a different world view and seek solutions through politics and the state. For middle classes coming from historically marginalized sections, the state remains an important centre where they gain or lose power, and hence continue to depend on the state and its framework of social justice, rights and entitlements, and on representative democracy. For while they may share the aspiration of their metropolitan counterparts (depending on their caste, religion and other locations), their consumption pattern and location in the economy is not the same. They do not have the same proximity to power, nor the same visibility as the urban dominant middle classes. As an ideological construct, the middle classes, particularly the new middle classes, are the new "moral majority" who despite being a small proportion of the total population, have come to occupy a hegemonic position, and their worldview, aspirations and values are influential far beyond themselves (Singh, 2014).

Third, middle classes exist as an empirical reality and an ideological construct. As an empirical reality, middle classes are defined in economic

terms, using income level, consumption patterns, and ownership of assets. Based on this criteria, the National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) through an exhaustive survey, identified 153 million people in this category as per 2001 data, with a disposable income of Rs 200,000 to 1,000,000 (\$4,380 - \$21,890) a year (Singh, 2014).

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### **13.5 THE MIDDLE CLASS MOVEMENT: LOOKING HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

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While scanning literature on the subject, one is disappointed at the absence of studies on middle-class movements per se, whereas one finds studies on peasant, working-class or tribal movements. This is not because the middle-class movements are few in number, nor because scholars have an aversion towards the middle class. They do take cognisance of the role of the middle class in various movements. But these movements are primarily analysed in terms of the issues that they raise, such as social reform movements, the nationalist movement, human rights movements, ecology movements, and so on. Or, these movements are called ‘mass movements’, as the issues are not class-specific, nor affecting mainly the middle class.

Nonetheless, historically there have been many instances where we can see that middle classes at the forefront of leading and participating in movements. The middle class participated in various stages of India’s freedom movement. The major events of their collective action were the partition of Bengal in 1906, the non-cooperation campaign in the early 1920s, the anti-Simon agitation in the mid-1920s, Civil Disobedience movements in the early 1930s, and the Quit India movement in 1942. Besides these, there were a number of local-level campaigns—organised and spontaneous—against the British Raj. Though there are a large number of studies on the freedom movement, most of them are mainly focused on leadership and their decisions. A few studies on the Bhang-bhang movement, the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Quit India

movement, point out that there were close links between local politics and national agitations (Stoddart ) (Kumar, 2016).

### **13.5.1 Post Independence Period**

After independence, the country underwent many changes as well as social upheavals. One of these shifts was the introduction of affirmative actions which faced tremendous flake from a privileged lot of the society. The upper-caste Hindu middle class launched struggles in Bihar and Gujarat against reservation for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other backward classes. Upper-caste government servants also launched agitations against the roster system which provided certain benefits to Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe employees. These agitations were primarily the result of the conflict of economic interests between upper and deprived caste groups; the middle-class leaders of these agitations raised the issue of 'merit', 'secularism' and 'efficiency'. While analysing the 1981 anti-reservation agitation in Gujarat, I.P. Desai argues that the economic structure was not able to provide employment opportunities for the lower strata of the higher castes. By now, there are a few articles on the Gujarat anti-reservation agitation providing information about the socio-economic and political dimensions of the conflict between the upper castes and the deprived groups. These two agitations were considered essential struggles within the middle class. They were fights between the upper- and middle-castes members on the one hand, and the new entrants from the low castes on the other who invariably fell into the category of the middle class. Some sections of the middle class—white-collar government employees, school and university teachers, etc.—launched movements on economic issues affecting them, such as revision of pay scales, bonus, job security. Though there is no systematic study on the struggles, a few descriptive accounts and analyses of the demands are available (Kumar, 2016).

Besides, The middle class of south India launched struggles during the 1950s and 1960s against the imposition of Hindi and for the retention of

English. For them, it was a struggle against Hindi imperialism. The middle class of linguistic groups such as Marathi, Gujarati, Telegu and Punjabi, demanded the formation of linguistic states in the 1950s. They launched agitations for these demands. For maintenance of their cultural identity, the middle class among the Tamilian, the Punjabi, the Naga, the Mizo populations, the tribals of Chhota Nagpur area, spearheaded agitations for the formation of separate states within or outside the Indian Union.

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### **13.6 MIDDLE CLASSES, DEMOCRACY AND ELECTORAL POLITICS**

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In prevailing theories, the middle class has often been considered the mainstay of democracy. Here, a direct correlation is made between higher economic development, education, middle class and higher political participation, open political attitudes (toleration of opposition, inter-personal trust). However, the Indian experience defies these theories.

While it can be argued that the notion of the authentic middle class, progressive and liberal in its views, is a myth the world over, this is particularly true in the Indian context. For, far from having a rationalist modern political attitude, Indian middle class use their social and cultural capital in contradictory ways: advocating radical change and preservation of tradition; liberty and authoritarianism; equality and hierarchy all at the same time. As mentioned earlier, their political attitudes are largely influenced by their location in the caste, religion, ethnicity, language subgroup and the Indian middle classes have not militated against identity politics. Even as the new middle class becomes globally mobile, inhabits modern spaces, uses the language of modernity, they actively participate in articulations of identity politics of both the dominant "majorities" and of the "minorities" (Singh, 2014).

Besides, their actions are about protecting their own interests and social privileges. Many scholars have also pointed out to the preoccupation of the

middle classes with their own ken of interests and consumption, and immunity to abject poverty and deprivation around; their zealous protection of upper caste privileges and promotion of *Hindutva* (Hindu right-wing nationalism); to their thriving on "connections", family and patronage. There are of course exceptions, and sections of middle classes have spoken out or joined progressive movements, but these at large have been the dominant tendencies of Indian middle classes (Singh, 2014).

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### 13.7 NEW FORMS OF MOVEMENTS

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Along with this, the middle class has been increasingly turning to 'new politics' to set policy agendas without being dependent on electoral results. This 'new politics' centres around new forms of organizations and "associational activism" – all in the domain of the civil society. For instance, if one examines middle-class voting behaviour in the decentralized local government of Indian cities, on one hand, the middle classes have withdrawn from participating in the local self-governance elections (in contrast to urban poor and marginalized groups). On the other hand, the middle classes have entered the local governance structures and exercise their clout over decision making through civil society organizations, middle class neighbourhood associations, such as Advanced Locality Management groups (ALMs), or Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs), or other parallel structures which are increasingly becoming integral part of the governance of cities - circumventing the formal democratic process and undermining their value. (Singh, 2014)

Of late, the 'middle class' has increasingly sought to influence national agenda and policies through new forms of citizens' activism and on issues that directly affect it. For a while now, middle-class anger has been spilling into city squares and streets. Given their 'ownership' of digital and media technology, their intersecting interest with mainstream media, and televisions, their protests and anger have become spectacular and received far more coverage and attention than any other protests by tribals, the poor,

or Dalits in India. However, from the initial middle class protests such as demand for "justice" for Jessica Lal, justice for Priyadarshini Mattoo, and Nitish Katara , to the later anti-corruption protests in 2011, and the anti-rape protests in 2012, – these movements grew more amorphous, drawing in the aspiration and some participation of urban working-class (Singh, 2014).

This cross-class 'collectivized' anger on the urban street, proved to be a significant catalyst in the rise of the AAP, a political party that emerged out of the anti-corruption movement. Despite AAP's origin in a middle-class movement, its entry into electoral politics compelled it to expand its base and get far more inclusive. It can be argued that it has been able to ride on the "homogenization of aspiration" wave unfolding in urban India - by carefully expanding the politics of corruption to link it with cross-class issues such as price rise, and *bijli, sadak, pani* (electricity, roads, water), and education in urban cities. While consolidating the support of the middle class, AAP successfully enlisted a large support base among the urban working class and poor, migrant workers, others living in urban slums, resettlement and unauthorized colonies (Singh, 2014).

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### 13.8 SUMMING UP

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We have understood from the above discussion on the middle-class movements that in different points of time, middle classes have been associated and even spearheaded many movements. However, because of the heterogeneity and the large size of the group, the documentation of their participation is inadequate. We have attempted to look and analyse some of the vital aspects of new middle-class movements in India contextualising them in a socio-historical and contemporary political scenario.

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### 13.9 QUESTIONS

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1. Define middle class. What is the newness in the new middle class?



2. What is the socio-historical context that precipitated the new middle-class movements?
3. How do you understand the contemporary political context as the field of new middle-class movements?

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### 13.10 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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Fernandes, L., & Heller, P. (2006). Hegemonic Aspirations. *Critical Asian Studies*, 495-522.

Gooptu, N. (2013). *Enterprise Culture in Neoliberal India: Studies in Youth, class, work and media*. Routledge, Oxon.

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## **UNIT 14: NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA: ETHNIC MOVEMENTS**

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

14.1 Introduction

14.2 Objectives

14.3 Concept of Ethnicity in Relation to Ethnic Movements

14.4 Ethnic Movements in India

14.4.1 Naga Movement

14.4.2 Bodo Movement

14.5 Summing up

14.6 Questions

14.7 Recommended readings and references

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### **14.1 INTRODUCTION**

Social Movement refers to the collective mobilization of people for a change in the social structure. Ethnic movement, as a part of the social movement, refers to the collective mobilization of an ethnic group for establishing their issues and grievances and make a strong position in the social structure for a social change. The concept of ethnicity has always attracted various academic disciplines as the concept is loaded with various approaches and dimensions. For a general interpretation, we can hold the view that ethnicity simply refers to the cultural practices and outlooks of a given community of people which set them apart from others. Members of an ethnic group feel culturally distinct from other groups. Thus, the idea of ‘we vs others’ is very relevant in understanding uniqueness of the ethnic

criterion for a group. We can differentiate among different groups based on different ethnic characteristics each of the group possesses. The question of identity arising out of the ethnic characteristics has been regarded as a vital element in the academic circle as a topic of debate and discussion. Many groups are coming to locate their unique identity based on the ethnic criterion which has become predominant in the different socio-political contexts across different time-frames.

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## **14.2 OBJECTIVES**

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In this unit, we will try to understand the concept of ethnicity and its different implications and how the questions revolving around the idea of ethnicity and identity lead to the emergence of a social movement. The unit will look at the historical processes as well as the different socio-political context that led to the emergence of different ethnic movements in India. By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the concept of ethnicity and different ethnic movements and their implications;
- Analyse the patterns and processes of different ethnic movements in India;
- Explain the two important ethnic movements from North East India- Naga movement and Bodo Movement.

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## **14.3 CONCEPT OF ETHNICITY IN RELATION TO ETHNIC MOVEMENTS**

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Ethnicity refers to shared historical and cultural heritage. It denotes the differences based on cultural, religious and historical heritage which confer distinctive identities. All societies are composed of cultures linked to different ethnic histories. At first glance, ethnicity is seemingly a straightforward concept, but in fact, it is subjected to different interpretations. Some scholars denote the notion of ethnicity with the

ancestral lineage and on the other hand, some scholars interpret it through the basis of physical attributes. Members of different ethnic groups see themselves as distinct from other groups. These cultural distinctions can be broadly incorporated into the dimensions of understanding the notion of ethnicity. The notion of 'we vs others' plays a very significant role in understanding the ethnic uniqueness of a group. Cultural characteristics such as language, history, religion, dressing pattern often play a deterministic role in pointing out the ethnic identity of a group.

Noted scholar J. Milton Yinger (1985) held the view that ethnicity refers to a segment of a longer society is seen by others to be different in some combination of the following characteristics- language, religion, race and ancestral homeland with its related culture; the members also perceive themselves in that way; and they participate in shared activities built around their (real or mythical) common origin or culture. Thus, by this holistic definition of ethnicity Yinger put forward the idea that any group which believes itself to be an ethnic group and acts in terms of that belief can be regarded as an ethnic group. In this regard, he was looking at the composition of ethnic groups mainly on three grounds. These are-

- (a) An immigrant population sharing a common former citizenships can be the basis of an ethnic group. Americans, Koreans, Filipinos and Vietnamese are the examples of this type of ethnic group formation.
- (b) A sub-societal group that shares a common descent and cultural background can be also regarded as an ethnic group. In this regard, Yinger gave the examples of Native American groups such as Oneida Indians and the Iroquois, Turkomans in Iran or Albanians in the former Yugoslavia
- (c) Thirdly, pan-cultural groups of persons of widely different cultural and societal backgrounds who, however, can be identified as similar on the basis of language, race or religion mixed with broadly

similar statuses. Hispanics in America or Asians in Britain can be regarded in this type of ethnic criterion.

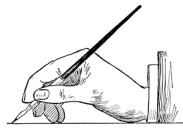
Thus, Yinger has given his idea of ethnicity basically on these three broad dimensions.

**Stop and read**

**Race:** Race refers to a category of people who share biologically transmitted traits that members of society deem socially significant. Thus, race is the classification of people based on different physical attributes such as skin colour, facial features, hair texture and body shape. Some scholars are using the concept of race and ethnicity interchangeably. On the other hand, some scholars have given distinctive ideas on both the concepts. Simply, we can say that race usually refers to a presumed significant biological difference between the groups, whereas ethnicity refers to differences based on cultural, religious and historical heritage which confer distinctive identities.

The concept of ethnicity is fluid and open for different interpretations. In particular, it can be very difficult to distinguish clearly between different ethnic groups. Many groups are themselves subdivided and they may overlap with other groups. A person may be 'Assamese' and at the same time, he is an 'Indian'. In this regard, different scholars have different ideas regarding the concept of ethnicity. In further discussion, we will be focusing on the notion of ethnicity and its implications in the emergence of a social movement.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What do you understand by ethnicity?

2. How can the concept of 'race' be related with the concept of 'ethnicity'?

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### 14.4 ETHNIC MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

India is a multiculturally multidimensional country which has been inhabited by people having different caste, class and culture. Many scholars held the view that 'India' is a constructed ideology having different multi-nationalities. Different 'nation-states' combining comprises the state of India. That is the reason why you may find co-existence of a different ethnic group in India. There is a huge cultural difference between North and South India or North-East India. The cultural traits, festivals, dressing pattern, language reflects the multiculturalism that exists in Indian society.

Our conventional wisdom promotes the idea of the close relationship between ethnic groups and the nation-building process. In most of the cases, these two schemes of ideas would go in a conflicting direction. The history of mankind always reflected the fact of identifying oneself with the member of an ethnic group or organization. The self-identification may primarily be determined by certain symbols which may tend to vary from time to time and area to area. So it is very difficult to fix the anchorage of

the identity of oneself either in the context of time or space with anyone of the symbols which are normally tuning the instinct of human being to mark his or her placement to satisfy the socio-economic and political needs. Thus, identification of oneself or identity is a swing move from one end to another in a continuum. Furthermore, it has many dimensions and at a point of time, human beings are identified with different objects, analytically called symbols and through identification, they extend loyalty to different objects and realise their material benefits mostly and psychological satisfaction rarely. This fluctuating identity and loyalty have been described and analysed by historians, anthropologists, sociologists, economists, psychologists, political scientists from the historic past to the present in various terms. (Palanithurai, 1990).

The study of the processes by which ethnic groups and nations are formed can be linked to different approaches of understanding whether they are 'natural', 'primordial', 'given' communities or whether they are creations of interested leaders, or elite groups or of the political systems in which they are included. Different interpretations regarding these ideas can be forwarded. The primordialist argues that there is an 'attachment' which a person carries throughout his life. This attachment' has been derived from his place of birth, religion, kinship relationships, language and social practices which becomes 'natural' for a person. Eventually, this 'natural attachment' is providing a basis for 'affinity' with other people from the same background. It is not actual descent that is considered essential to the definition of an ethnic group but a belief of common descent. India, being the hub of different fluid ethnic identities, is bound to create a complex conflicting direction out of these contexts. The ethnic identities are variable and a multilingual and multicultural country like India many people command more than one language, dressing pattern, language or dialect. If we take the example of Naga ethnicity, it alone consists of 14 different tribal groups in which each group are having their language, dress or their cultural traits. They have created a lingua franca called 'Nagamese' to

reduce the cultural gap and creating a bond to communicate among themselves. We will discuss the Naga ethnicity in detail in the latter part of this unit. Thus, we can say that some aspects of the culture are changeable and the boundaries of the ethnic groups may be shifted looking into the course of social and political movements that promote the interests in raising the issues. In addition to this, we can say that the chauvinist attitude of the elite powerful ethnic group over the other less powerful groups may also ignite a social movement. In this context, we can take the example of the Bodo movement. The chauvinistic attitude of the larger Assamese mainstream population has ignited the flame which resulted in the form of Bodo movement. More precisely, it is an example where elites and counter-elites within ethnic groups select aspects of a group's culture, attach new values and meanings to them, and mobilise the group, to defend its interests and to compete with other groups.

#### **14.4.1 Naga Movement**

The origin and growth of Naga nationalism, the pioneering role of Angami Zapo Phizo, the sacrifices and sufferings of the Naga people in their sustained fight against a powerful Indian state, the gradual rise of tribalism within the movement, the resultant split in the Naga National Council (NNC) and the emergence of the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), further splits and fratricidal killings, peace talks with the Government of India which continue to drag on for over a decade, the role of civil society- all these and much more now form the history and collective memory of Naga people (Mishra, 2014). If we trace the history, during the Ahom rule of Assam from the middle of the thirteenth century, the non-interference policy was adopted towards the frontier area of Nagaland. Although the policy of non-interference was adopted, the Ahoms were always having a close watch and was maintaining a close bonding with the Nagas because of the geographically strategic locations of the inhabiting areas of the Naga tribes. Although occasionally some punitive expeditions were taken against the Naga tribes who raided the



villages of the Assam plains, the Ahom kings realized that the interference in the internal administration of the Nagas would bring mutual complexities between them. That is why the acknowledgement on non-interference in Naga affairs reflected a cordial relation between the Assamese and the Nagas. Following the Ahoms, Britishers were also following the principle of non-interference toward the Nagas, because, as forwarded by them, they wanted to 'protect' the hill tribes from the exploitation of the Plainsmen. But later it was found that it was a policy of British administration to win the trust of the hill tribes. Along with that, initially, British administrations did not regard the hilly areas to be profitable for them. This has been evident from a fact that in 1929, Naga club, a club constituted by the Naga elites, had submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission demanding that the Nagas should be excluded from the scope of proposed constitutional changes and be kept under the direct administration of the British. In this memorandum, Naga club had stated: *'You (The British) are the only people who have ever conquered us and when you go we should be as we were'*. This was a strong message by the Naga ethnic nationality to the upcoming Indian nationality that they are not a part of the proposed land of India and demanded a separate independent nation. The members of the Naga club later formed the NNC (Naga National Club), the political wing of the underground Naga Federal government. The feeling of separateness from the rest of the Indian states is so widely shared by the Nagas that it may be said that it is one of the prime forces which held them together in a long strong struggle against the state of India. Nagas are made up of at least 14 tribal groups who have no common language and often hostile towards each other. But they are coming under one umbrella of Naga nationalism in the demand of the greater Nagaland.

As British paramountcy ended in India in 1947, Angami Zapo Phizo, the president of Naga National Council (NNC) declared the independence of Nagaland on August 14, 1947. The position of NNC was very clear on the demands of –

- (a) The greater part of the Naga territory was never ruled by the British
- (b) Nagas always existed as an 'independent' community
- (c) They had never been a part of the 'India'
- (d) Their right to voluntary union with India should be accepted by the new rules of the country.

Since then the Naga struggle begins and continues, witnessing turmoil, ups and downs and continuous struggle. The mutual discussions between the leaders of the Naga Movement reflected in various developments but were never been able to blow away the igniting flame of the Naga struggle. In 1963, Nagaland was declared as a separate state but the situation remained unchanged in Nagaland. After the Shillong Accord was signed in 1975 between the Government of India and leaders of NNC, it was assumed that the accord would end the long struggle. But instead, the accord was bringing a split in the NNC and witnessed the birth of NSCN (Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland). NSCN was formed on 31st January 1980 by Isak Chishi Swu, Thuingaleng Muivah and SS Khaplang. But as differences coped up, again a split occurred among the Naga leaders and on April 30, 1988, NSCN was divided into two groups- NSCN (IM) lead by Isak and Muivah and NSCN (K) lead by Khaplang. NSCN (IM) has strong international support and that is why they have been able to place the issues of Nagas in the international platforms which are making the issue of Nagas more complex. Running a parallel federal government, the Naga leaders are not only challenging the Indian federalism but also helping the other insurgent groups of Northeast India to fight against the state of India. The primary aim of the NSCN is to establish a 'Greater Nagalim' which comprises of all Naga –inhabited areas including even the areas of Myanmar. Even The Nagaland Assembly in the year 1964, passed a resolution supporting all Naga inhabited areas under one umbrella. This resolution has been further adopted four times in the assembly creating a conflictual situation in the neighbouring states of Assam and Manipur.

Various efforts have been adopted by the Government of India to solve the issues of Nagaland. In the year 1992, MM Thomas, the then Governor of Nagaland made the first successful move to get in touch with the NSCN leaders. Then on June 15 1995, former Prime Minister of India P.V. Narasimha Rao met the leadership of NSCN (IM) in Paris. A ceasefire was agreed upon with the Government of India with effect from August 1997. Subsequently, various rounds of discussions were occurring in the prime-ministerial level. Recently, in 2015, a historic framework agreement has been signed between the leaders of NSCN (IM) and Government of India. But the Government of India is yet to reveal the details of the Framework Agreement. Thus, starting from creating an umbrella of Naga ethnicity through hostile armed struggle and diplomatic negotiations the Naga Struggle have been loaded with a complex vicinity of ethnic movement.

#### **14.4.2 Bodo Movement:**

The region of Northeast India has been the homeland of various communities known for their distinct cultural traits. As a means to strengthen the nation-building process, the policies of homogenization and assimilation designed by the post-colonial state to integrate different ethnic categories within the fold of composite Assamese nationalism opened the door for ethnic movement and cultural reconstruction. In this regard, we can take the issues of the Bodo movement. The Bodos are also known as Kacharis, Bodos and as the Bodo-Kacharis. They are the largest ethnic community of Assam as well as Northeast India. Though the Bodos are found in the entire Brahmaputra valley and hills of Karbi-Anglong, they are mostly concentrated in the southern bank of the river Brahmaputra, in the lower Assam adjoining the entire foothills of Bhutan and the Western part of the Arunachal Pradesh. Since the early fifties, Bodos have been trying to revive their unique identity against the dominant Assamese ethnic group. Earlier the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) and the Plains' Tribal Council of Assam (PCTA) were the premier representative body of the Bodos. PCTA demanded Udayachal, a Union Territory for the plains tribes of Assam in 1973. As Bodo politics became more exclusive, PTCA was dissolved and

till then from 1986 onwards, All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) under the leadership of Upendranath Brahma worked as the ethnic voice of Bodo nationality. Before that, in pre-independent India, Assam Kachari Yuva Sanmilan and Bodo Juba Sanmilan submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission (1928-30) to treat Bodos as a distinct community from the Assamese. Under the leadership of Rupnath Brahma and Bhimbar Deori, All Assam Tribal League was formed in 1933 to articulate the voices of Bodos and other ethnic minorities. After Independence, the hill tribes of Assam were granted some kind of autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution which was not extended to the Plains tribe of Assam. It was assumed that plains tribe of Assam were relatively more developed and that is why special attention has been given to the hill tribes. But it was alleged that in the mainstream Assamese social hierarchy, Bodos are never given a positive position which has created a tendency of alienation from the larger Assamese society among the Bodos.

Language is another important and influential area of Bodo-Assamese differentiation. Language works as a means for cultural mobilization to generate a level of consciousness among the Bodos in terms of their ethnic identity. The formation of Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) in 1953 gave a new dimension to the Bodo resurgence. BSS worked hard to establish the independent identity of the Bodo language and literature. They developed their language as a tool of consolidation and expansion of their ethnic identity. They have accepted Devnagari script abandoning Assamese script. This is reflecting the fact of abandoning the Asamiya identity. The Bodo language is now the medium of instruction up to the secondary level in Bodo-dominated areas. Apart from that, now Bodo has been recognized as one of the constitutionally scheduled languages under Eight Schedule of Indian constitution.

From 1985-1990 the Bodo Movement got its momentum under the leadership of ABSU. ABSU demanded the creation of Bodoland in 1987 as a separate state from Assam exclusively for the ethnic Bodos by '*dividing*

*Assam fifty-fifty*’ which was the slogan of the Bodo movement. While ABSU was representing an ethnic democratic voice of Bodos, BdSF (Bodoland Security Force) was adopting the radical violent way to establish Bodoland during the Bodo Movement. BdSF was formed on October 3 1986, later became National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). There was further split in NDFB resulted in the form of Bodoland Liberation Tigers (BLT). All these groups were representing the radical violent face of the Bodo Movement.

As the Bodo Movement got intensified, The Central Government started negotiations with the ABSU and Bodo People’s Action Committee (BPAC), which was another democratic organisation active during the Bodo movement. In this regard, on 25th February 1991, Government of India constituted an expert committee under the chairmanship of a retired IAS officer Dr Bhupender Singh to look into the issues raised by the Bodo Movement and to demarcate the area and made a recommendation on autonomy. The committee pointed out the limitation of implementing the demand of ‘divide Assam fifty-fifty’ and granted a separate territory for the Bodos because of lack of geographical contiguity of the Bodo inhabited areas. The proposed area was highly heterogeneous in case of ethnic composition. Although when the new government came into power in Assam the situation changed and again the dialogues of negotiations started. Ultimately, the leadership of the movement gave up the demand for a separate state and agreed to have ‘autonomous power’. In this regard, the Bodo accord was signed on 10th February 1993. As a result of this accord, an interim Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) was constituted. But BAC was not able to meet the need and expectation of the people because it was the state government who have got more power than the BAC. So the situation in the Bodo Areas again got into a vulnerable position. Law and order situation in BAC areas got deteriorated as the BLT and NDFB became active in those areas. The dialogues of negotiations again started and after a series of protracted talk, a memorandum of settlement (MOU) for the creation of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) was reached at a

tripartite meeting held in New Delhi on February 10 2003, between the representatives of Union Government, Assam Government and the BLT delegations. The BLT agreed to give up their armed struggle and became a part of the interim 12-member executive council of BTC. For the first time, the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution was granted to a plain tribe of Assam which is very significant. Although BTC was formed, the tension and complexities of Bodo Movement are still relevant and on various occasions, the issues of Bodo Movement has been still raised in various circumstances.

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### **14.5 SUMMING UP**

In a country like India, it is very difficult to understand and analyse the issues of various ethnic groups. From Kashmir to Kanyakumari, you will find ample examples of ethnic movements. From Khalistan Movement of Punjab to Shiv Sena Movement of Maharashtra, from Gorkhaland movement of West Bengal to Dravidian Movement of South India, India is witnessing the uprising of various ethnic groups raising their demands. In this unit, we have discussed two ethnic movements in details- Naga movement and Bodo movement. Both these movements belong to the North-eastern region of India. Northeast India is a hub of ethnic diversity. That is why we have discussed in detail about these two movements belonging to the North-eastern region. In this unit, we have discussed the basic ideas of ethnicity and how these ideas can be incorporated in analysing the ethnic movements of India.

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### **14.6 QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss how the ideas of ethnicity can be incorporated in understanding the ethnic movements of India.
2. Elucidate the role of Naga nationalism in the emergence of Naga movement.

3. Discuss the role of Assamese chauvinism in the emergence of Bodo movement.

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