Social movements and its impact on public policy in India

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INTRODUCTION

Social movements are products of social structure which affects policy making. The social movements brought to the fore through mobilized and aggregated interests and viewpoints of its members, articulate to the policy- makers to bring changes in the policies already made or for making new policies. In the wake of overall objectives and the objectivity in the demands made through the social movements, the policy-makers tend to enact policies as per the issues tabled forth through the social movements. The cooperation or lack of implementation of a policy extended or not extended through the social movements has substantial effect on the policy execution. The relationship, therefore, flanked by social movements and public policy is quite close and important in nature. In order to understand how social movements influence policy making, it is important to know the idea of social movements.

The idea of social movements:

Social Movements, in recent years, have attracted the attention of social anthropologists, political scientists and public administrators. Some of the scholars have used the term "movement" interchangeably with organization or union. It was in the beginning of the nineteenth century when the term social movement was used significantly in the European languages. It was mainly because of the social upheaval prevailing at that time. The focus of these social movements was on the changing society. They advocated improved and better property relationships suiting the interests of the exploited classes. In common parlance, media and political circles the term 'social movement' is often used loosely conveying different meanings. Sometimes it is used to show a historical trend like modernisation or urbanisation. The term is also used to indicate a set of activities undertaken by one or many organisations

to bring 'change' in society.

Paul Wilkinson in his book, Social Movements, has presented a working concept of the term "Social Movement". According to him, a social movement is a deliberate communal Endeavour to promote change in any direction and through any means, not excluding violence, illegality, revolution or withdrawal into the "utopian" community.

According to Herbert Blumer. "Social movements can be viewed as collective enterprises to establish a new order of life. They have their inception in the condition of unrest, and derive their motive power on one hand from dissatisfaction with the current form of life, and on the other hand, from wishes and hopes for a new scheme or system of living."

For Doug McAdam, social movements are "those organized efforts, on the part of excluded groups, to promote or resist changes in the structure of society that involve recourse to non-institutional forms of political participation."

Social movements have five main components *i.e.* objectives, ideology, programmes, leadership, and organisation. They are interdependent and influencing each other. Social movement is related to social and political change. So, it has an immediate and long term objective. The immediate objective may be to resolve a particular issue or protest against the decision of the authority. It takes up other issues and proceeds to a long term objective of changing authority, power relationship, dominance and political system.

Social movement involves mobilisation of people who in course of the process identify with the objective of the movement. They share values and begin to share a common understanding of social reality. For their mobilisation and to sustain their participation, the leader(s) evolve different programmes. This also requires some kind of organisation. The organisation may be loose or well formed with a centralised or decentralised decision-making system for launching programmes. An example of the peasant movement below explains further how a social movement affects public policy, its formulation and implementation.

Peasant movement:

India is predominantly an agrarian country. Based on the significant elements of social movements, *viz.,* communal mobilization, ideological stand, and change orientation, the agrarian movement in India is a separate form of social movement. This movement has been collectively organised to bring to the fore certain troubles or resist certain changes in the society through policies having impact on agrarian social structure in India. The Peasants are therefore, the small landholders, sharecroppers and agricultural laborers. The Peasant's movement can be defined as an organised and communal endeavour of the section of the society occupied in peasantry for changing the- ownership pattern, control of land, use of land, wage structure, share of agricultural produce and credit and institutional support system.

Among social movements in India which have attracted attention historically, for their intermittent yet widespread struggle are the peasant movements. Peasant movements in India have a long history going back to the colonial period which belies commonly held doubts regarding the revolutionary potential of Indian peasantry. In the post independence period, some of the issues and problems of the peasants continued to be raised in the peasant movements though the nature of these movements underwent a change. The post independent period saw a change in the nature of agrarian classes and interests resulting from the state

policies.

The peasant movements in independent India have become more internally differentiated. The class interests of the rich peasants and landowners have diverged from those of the small cultivators, sharecroppers and landless labourers. Since the green revolution which was accompanied by capitalist agriculture, a deeper penetration of the market economy and globalisation, peasant struggles have undergone a change.

This paper will study two peasant movements in the following sections:

1) Telangana movement
2) Naxalbari movement

Both the movements have been explained briefly in the following section.

Telangana Movement (1946-1952):

The Telangana Movement (1946-52) of Andhra Pradesh was fought against the feudal oppression of the rulers and local landowners. The agrarian social structure of Hyderabad emerged to be very oppressive in 1920s and thereafter. It was led through the Communists. Soon after independence, that is, in 1948, the Hyderabad State experienced a forceful outburst of the discontentment of peasantry. The peasants in Telangana region were under the control of the Jagirdars. As a result of the Jagirdari system of land tenure the peasants were under substantive oppression of jagirdari. The peasants were facing oppressions in the form of minimal wages, high rate of interest on loans, whimsical work circumstances to land owner's interests etc.

The peasants wanted to release themselves from such a tyrannical state of affairs. The socialists and communists attempted to mobilize the poor peasants against the Nizam. It took the form of a movement. In 1948, the movement underwent a shift. A landlord's employee was murdered through a village activist on an issue pertaining to land. This act raised a violent response. The Nizam tried to suppress the movement and this oppression was resisted strongly through the peasants not only through making use of traditional weapons but also through forming armed guerrilla squads. The peasants, and even the women joined the activists, fought successfully against the armed forces of the Nizam Lands of the jagirdars were seized and liberated zones were shaped. Approximately two years passed in such a thrash about. In 1949 the Indian army overthrew the Nizam of Hyderabad. It became a part of Indian Union. The socialists, who were a major force in mobilizing the people for the movement, withdrew from the movement. Slowly, with the passage of time, the movement came to an end. The net result of the movement was the abolition of the jagirdari system.

Naxalite movement (1967-71):

The Naxalite Movement had its operational area in West Bengal. The circumstances which were prevailing in the state were not conducive to the uplift of the peasantry. The Naxalite movement, which started in the village of Naxalbari, in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, adopted guerrilla warfare strategy. It was termed as a radical movement launched through the peasants. It was aimed at removal of exploitation of the peasantry through the landowners and money-lenders.

The movement operated in a revolutionary manner. The Naxalite movement spread

rapidly in many parts of the country, protracted arm resistance, declaration of liberated area, killing and arrest became a regular phenomena in the agrarian society of West Bengal. The peasants were united against the landowners and wanted to come out of their clutches. The attitude adopted was definitely hostile. The political parties having leftist leanings were supporting the movement aimed at bringing reforms in agrarian policies and institutional structure. Number of policies as a result of this movement, and also some others, were made.

Impact of these movements on Public policy:

The policies and programmes made through the Government from time to time do reveal the events initiated through the policy-makers for protecting the interests of the peasants and farmers. The governmental machinery ought to be responsive to the needs, demands and expectations of the citizens. 'Responsiveness' of policy-makers and implementers is a term which has socio-psychological dimensions. In accordance with the basic objective of the socialistic pattern of the society, the government has from time to time been making policies to protect and uplift the peasants and farmers. The social movements which were launched through peasants and farmers did give the government requisite feedback and thought for action to create policies which could help the specific sections more. Whenever the social movements organizers attempted to disturb peace and to destroy and damage public property the government machinery came into action. From this it cannot be inferred that the government had been anti- social movements or anti any demands having been made through the specific sections of the society through any movement. The public opinion mobilized through the social movements has been playing an active role in the formulation of policies conducive to the needs and some of the demands of the social movements. For ensuring adequate and timely marketing of the agricultural products and to save the farmers from the exploitative events of the "middlemen", the State governments have recognized Agricultural Marketing Boards.

Land reforms have been recognized and accepted as a significant instrument of economic and social change. Land reform policies were initiated in the country for achieving the twin objectives of rising agricultural production and ensuring social justice. Legislative events have been adopted for providing to the tenants security of tenure and for regulating rates of rent payable through them. Agricultural Price Policy was made to get the farmers and producers the due rates for the agricultural crops.

Agricultural price policy in India was introduced after independence. But the agricultural price policy formulated in India has varied widely for different years and also for different crops. This policy put much emphasis on the prices of foodgrains like wheat, rice and coarse cereals such as jowar, bajra and maize etc. Remunerative prices for the produce are essential in order to augment productivity and to improve the farmers socio-economic status so The Agricultural Price Commission (since renamed as Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices—CACP) was recognized in 1964. Its duty is to create recommendations on procurement/support prices in respect of the number of significant agricultural commodities. It has, in excess of the years, helped in the evolution of a stable and positive price policy for the agricultural producer.

From time to time the Government has launched special programmes of dissimilar types to help the peasants, farmers, and agricultural laborers. Programmes like, National Rural Employment Programme, Drought Prone Area Programme, Desert Development Programme etc. have been launched to help the uplift of the rural poor. In 1989-90, the Government launched specific programmes for helping specific categories of peasants and farmers. These contain:

Special Rice Production Programme in Eastern States, Special Food granules Production Programme, National Pulses Development Programme, National Oilseed Development Project, Rigorous Cotton Development Programme, Special Jute Development Programme and Reclamation of Alkali Soils in Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh.

Conclusion:

There have been many social movements in India since independence. Social movements are a major vehicle for ordinary people to participate in public politics. Primary goals of social movements deal with emancipation and flexibility. They try to bring change in society by attacking its established foundational ideas. Social movements serve a social project. An essential characteristic for them is the practice of influencing the policy makers. One such example is the peasant movement. Several policies were designed to protect the interests of the farmers and peasants. The peasant movement during the past two years has successfully brought the issues of the agrarian crisis before the country. Therefore, farmers are now a pressure group in our parliamentary democracy.

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