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## Contemporary Social Movements: Impact and Challenges

Naman Tarun Khulbe<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Dr. BR Ambedkar National Law University, Sonapat, India

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*Change is natural, all things go through it. Society is no exception. Social Changes happen in all human societies and they are constant. They can be sudden or happen slowly over a period of time. There can be many causes of such change to happen. Modernisation, westernization, industrialisation are some of the few phenomenons responsible for causing visible social changes. Among many other causes are social movements that cause a change in society by demanding it. Social movements have become an integral part of human life for ages. Social movements have played an important role in nation building as well. When people demand a change in society, it shows their right to freedom of speech and expression is still intact or that they value it. This is why social movements are necessary for a proper functioning free society. These movements are a great way for people to raise their concerns and demands. Social movements have touched all these matters and have brought change too.*

**Keywords:** *social, speech, freedom.*

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### INTRODUCTION

In simple words, social movements can be defined as Social movement, a loosely organized but sustained campaign in support of a social goal, typically either the implementation or the

prevention of a change in society's structure or values.<sup>1</sup> The German sociologist Lorenz von Stein in his book "History of the French Social Movement from 1789-1850" introduced the term social movement. These movements are mostly formed by a collective group of people. There are no criteria for how these people should be or how many of them are there. All that matters is the participants of the movement share a common outlook on society. This could be to carry out a social reform, oppose or reverse it. It is a form of group action and may include people, groups, or both. There are slightly varying meanings of the word. Social movements have been identified as "organizational structures and strategies that may empower oppressed populations to mount effective challenges and resist the more powerful and advantaged elites".

According to Turner and Killian, A social movement is formally defined as "a collective acting with some continuity to promote or resist change in the society or group of which it is a part". According to Neil J. Smelser, social movements can be defined as "organised group effort to generate or resist social change. Thus, a social movement is an effort by an association to bring about a change in society. A social movement may also be directed to resist a change. Some movements are directed to modify certain aspects of the existing social order whereas others may aim to change it completely. The former is called reform movements and the latter is known as revolutionary movements.

Social movements have been studied by both subjects of sociology and political science. Some students of political science find social movements to be related to mass movements, the emergence of new political parties, and their role in shaping politics through their agenda. Now let's take a look at some of the most important contemporary social movements that have taken place in the past decade.

## **2011 INDIAN ANTI CORRUPTION MOVEMENT**

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis M Killian, 'Social Movement | Definition, Types, Theories, & Facts' (*Encyclopedia Britannica*) <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-movement>> accessed 02 August 2021

The 2011 Indian anti-corruption movement wasn't a sudden movement. It was a combination of a series of corruption cases that we're exposed over the years. Scams such as 2G scam, Coalgate Scam, Commonwealth games Scam, Adarsh housing society scam, and many more that happened under the UPA government. Anna Hazare was an Indian social activist who led movements to promote rural development, increase government transparency, and investigate and punish official corruption<sup>2</sup>.

Anna Hazare wanted a joint committee composed of members of the government and of civil society to be formed to draft tougher anti-corruption legislation. The then Prime minister Manmohan Singh rejected his demand. This led Anna Hazare to sit on a hunger strike on 5 April 2011. He sat on a fast until legislation was passed. His actions attracted a lot of attention from celebrities to opposition political parties. Bharatiya Janata Party and Communist Marxist party showed support in favour of Hazare. It was visible that the support was for political gains. Anna Hazare did not allow any politician to join him in the protests. Uma Bharti and om Prakash Chautala approached to join him in the protests but were turned back. Soon the news about protests became widespread and many sympathy protests started happening in support of Anna Hazare outside Delhi in Mumbai, Banglore, Hyderabad. Even students got involved and asked for Hazare's demands to be met. Similar protests against the ruling party and corruption started happening in other countries. Demonstrators arrived outside Indian embassies to show solidarity. Soon the effects of the protests started brewing. Sharad Pawar, the then minister of agriculture resigned after Hazare accused him of corruption. On 9 April, the government agreed to form a drafting committee. politician Pranab Mukherjee would be chairman and a non-politician activist Shanti Bhushan would be co-chairman. Bhushan, together with Hazare, Justice N. Santosh Hegde, advocate Prashant Bhushan and RTI activist Arvind Kejriwal, had originally drafted the Lokpal Bill. By mid-June 2011, the Jan Lokpal drafting committee was in disagreement and government representatives said if a consensus was not reached, both the government draft and that by the civil society representatives, would be sent to the Cabinet. Hazare said if only the government version of the bill was passed by parliament, he would start a hunger strike on 16 August 2011. 28 August 2011

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

actually saw an apotheosis of the movement. The crowd was actually filled with joy and public celebrations started in the streets. The public procession spread for almost 5 kilometers up to India Gate and by the evening the whole streets were filled with the Indian tricolor and by the followers of Anna Hazare, wearing their trademark whitecaps with the slogan "Mai Bhi Anna " written on it. This showed that a major political change was brewing up. And since political change affects the social structure, it can also be termed as social change. People were visibly fed up with the ruling government. This paved the way for BJP to win the 2014 general elections with the full majority on the promise of no corruption compared to the UPA government. There was mass awareness of corruption in society.

This moment also led to the emergence of a new political party known as the Aam Aadmi Party which was led by an activist of Anna Hazare, Arvind Kejriwal. This party later on single-handedly was able to win the daily elections and paved the way for Arvind Kejriwal to become the Chief Minister of Delhi. From this example, we can see that a single social movement can have many remarkable implications on society. This moment not only made the people aware of the corruption but also paved the way for a new political party to emerge. Therefore it was successful in affecting both the social as well as the political sphere of the society.

## **2012 DELHI GANG RAPE PROTESTS**

Jyoti Singh, A 23 year old woman who was victim to a gruesome gang rape and murder case succumbed to her injuries on 28 December 2012 but not before igniting the fire that would take over the streets of Delhi and raise demands across the entire nation for stricter laws and women's safety. Thousands of protesters dotted the streets of Delhi, held a candlelight March in solidarity with Nirbhaya's family in front of India gate. Police had to seal off large parts of central Delhi close to government buildings, closed down a number of metro railway stations, and asked people not to travel into the city. There was a riot-like situation because of anger in people's hearts. There was an utter demand for social change. Up until then, rape wasn't a subject that was discussed because of its sensitivity. India's Home Affairs minister, Ratanjit Pratap Narain Singh, said he was "heartbroken" by her death.

"I can only assure the family that the government will take whatever steps are needed to ensure that her killers get the harshest punishment in the quickest of time," he said. "The government will work overtime to try and bring about laws and steps that will ensure that no other person, no other citizen of this country, has to go through or undergo the same kind of trauma."<sup>3</sup> The gruesomeness of the case made nirbhaya a household name. Nirbhaya means braves. Taking the movement into account, several measures were announced by the government at the centre and various states to ensure the safety of women, and the demand of the mass for the hanging of the culprits was fulfilled. Although not much has changed from the government, there has been a positive impact for sure. People are now much aware of this issue and demand stricter legislation over this crime.

## **2019 HONG KONG PROTESTS**

Hong Kong is a semi-autonomous protectorate of China which was earlier a part of the British Empire. The British had an agreement under which until 2047, Hong Kong will have autonomy as to governance. China has however from time to time violated this accord and dictated its terms with regards to law and order in the territory as it claims Hong Kong is an integral part of China. In April 2019, a bill was introduced under which China can extradite anyone from Hong Kong. Critics feared that this could open honest citizens who're against the CCP to cruelty and unfair trials. This was a violation of the British-sino treaty as well. Thousands of people took the streets to protest against the controversial bill. Leader Carrie Lam promised that the bill would be suspended indefinitely however protesters feared its revival. There were violent clashes against protesters and police. China was accused of human rights violations. Soon the protesters started raising questions on China's treatment of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang province and CCP's blatant violation of human rights. Motivation for protesting went way beyond just against the bill. It became a demand for independence as well. There were rallies around the globe as well. People in Canada, UK, and Australia protested outside Chinese embassies to make the communist party back down from enforcing the extradition bill.

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<sup>3</sup> Sanjoy Majumder, 'Protests in India after Delhi Gang-Rape Victim Dies' (*BBC News*, 2012) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-20863707>> accessed 04 August 2021

## BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT

The USA which has had a history of racial discrimination and cruelty towards minority had a triggering reaction to the killing of a black man George Floyd that led to perhaps the biggest social protest in the history of America. On May 25, 2020, A black man named George Floyd was arrested for allegedly passing a counterfeit 20\$ bill in Minneapolis. During his arrest, George was handcuffed and laid down facing the street with a white officer named Derik Chauvin holding him down by putting his knee on his neck. This was recorded on camera by onlookers and passersby. George was vocally saying he couldn't breathe clearly but to no avail. After 8 minutes, he died of suffocation. Medical findings concluded that George died from homicide by "cardiopulmonary arrest". He had a heart condition and was also tested positive for covid recently. George's family commissioned a second autopsy in which it was found out that Floyd's death was a homicide caused by asphyxia due to neck and back compression. This led to mass demonstrations on the streets of US cities. Riots also happened. A similar situation also happened in 1992 during the Los Angeles riots after the Rodney King incident after a black man was killed brutally by police officers. This time protests were on a wider scale because of the advent of social media. The black lives matter movement gained a lot of relevance in this period. When the movement reached its peak on June 6, more than five lakh people turned out on streets in more than 550 places across the United States<sup>4</sup>.

According to a report by Civis Analytics, a data science firm that works with businesses and Democratic campaigns about 15 million to 26 million people in the United States of America have participated in the demonstrations after the death of George Floyd. Due to this large number of participation, crowd counting exports and Scholars are referring to this movement as one of the largest in American history. The black lives matter movement is not new it has been around since 2013, but the recent protests and the death of George Floyd shifted the public opinion in favor of the movement as well as broaden the support. With the support of organizations like the NFL and NASCAR, the people who usually used to sit on the sidelines

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<sup>4</sup> Larry Buchanan, 'Black Lives Matter may be the Largest Movement in U.S. History' (*Nytimes.com*, 2020) <<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html>> accessed 04 August 2021

and never protested in any sort of movement were also encouraged to take part in it. These protests also led to a major change in the political sphere. President Donald Trump and the republican party were extensively targeted. They were blamed not only for racial discrimination but for gun violence, poor governance during the time of covid, shifting blame to others such as ANTIFA. Trump's popularity was massively hit by these protests. He was termed as a white supremacist. Celebrities, netizens, politicians all alike demanded his resignation.

According to a poll from The Washington Post and the Kaiser Family Foundation, one in five Americans said that they had participated in a protest since the start of the Trump administration, and 19 percent said. They were new to protesting. This was one of the factors Trump's opponent, Joe Biden banked on winning the 2020 US presidential elections.

## **CHALLENGES TO SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

Social movements are met with challenges as there are always those who oppose them. Every demand for social change attracts politics. These movements draw politicians and their evil vices. The movements nevertheless manage to achieve some of their intended objectives with the obstacles faced by social movements. Anyone demanding a change can be branded as anti national because that person is challenging an existing system and a ruling government. In modern India, social movements have always been pursued when this is the only option left. Movements can attract abuse, and there is a saying that "the individual should be ready for war for a person to achieve peace." These movements inform people about the different ways in which inequalities can be prevented. It is important for people to know when social movements should be involved and when the movements should not be involved. Social movements may not always be positive. Some can be negative as well. Demand for genocide and programs are war crimes violating human rights however they can easily come under the social movement category as they seek a change in the social order. The MAP Movement can be taken as an example. Minor attracted persons are pedophiles coming up with a more sophisticated term to justify themselves under the pretext of an oppressed community. So preventing a social movement to have a negative impact is a major challenge. Another

challenge for social movements and CSOs is to expose the reality and consequences of these narratives. Show their binary impact on each other, how each sustains the other, their impact on people and institutions. And that a nonviolent alternative is a legitimate possibility.

## **CONCLUSION**

Social movements have mostly been beneficial to society at large. These movements prove to be essential for a thriving democracy and also a voice to the people in non-democratic countries. Anyone can initiate a social movement if he/she truly believes in the cause but one also has to ensure that the social movement doesn't cause more damage than benefit and the challenges of initiating one. India has had a rich history of social movements. Serving as an inspiration and guidance on how to conduct one. These social movements have helped us reach where we are. Anna Hazare's movement against corruption made the government realise its place and brought the whole country together. Nirbhaya protests brought a reality check to countrymen who thought our country is safe for women for having female gods being worshipped. Hong Kong protests showed how valuable liberty is and the Black lives matter movement showed how centuries old racial discrimination is still practiced today and Black people are treated as second class citizens even in the most developed parts of the world. These movements educate us and help us learn from our mistakes.