

**Social
Movements
in
North-East
India**

**EDITED BY
M.N. KARNA**

Social Movements in NORTH-EAST INDIA



Edited by

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Preface

The North-East India Council for Social Science Research as a part of its bi-decennial celebration (1974-1994) organised a two day Seminar on 'Social Movements in North-East India' with special reference to women, youth and religion in August 1994. Scholars from the region and outside actively participated in it. Social movement is a trend and a process by which the people express their aspirations and ideologies. However, forms and contents of social movements vary from situation to situation. We are to take a flexible and dynamic approach to understand the meaning, source, ideology and organisation of contemporary social movements.

Professor B. Pakem, Vice-Chancellor, North-Eastern Hill University not only inaugurated the seminar but also provided academic leadership to the seminar.

We are grateful to the Indian Council of Historical Research and the Indian Council of Social Science Research, North-Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong for giving us generous financial support for undertaking this study.

We take this opportunity to thank Professor A.K. Danda of North Bengal University, Prof. P.K. Mishra, Professor M.N. Karna and Dr. L.S. Gassah of North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong for presiding over academic sessions of the seminar.

We wish to record our appreciation of the services of Professor M.N. Karna, who agreed to edit the volume to give a meaningful interpretation of the trends of social movement in North-East India. We thank Dr. C.J. Thomas, Deputy Director, Indian Council of Social Science Research, N.E.R.C., Shillong for his help in the matter of the publication of this volume. We also thank St. Edmund's College

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authorities, specially Rev. Br. S. Cohelo for providing us the infrastructural facilities for holding this seminar.

To the publisher, we owe a debt of gratitude for publishing the volume which is an important study on contemporary North-East India.

B. DATTA RAY
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for Social Science Research,
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Editor's Acknowledgement

The papers brought together in this book were presented at a Seminar organised by the North-East India Council for Social Science Research at Shillong during August 26-27, 1994. Several academicians and social activists from all over the North-East attended and actively participated in the deliberations of the seminar. The regional context and specificities of cultural ambience of India's north-east are clearly visible in these essays on social movements.

The papers have been thematically put under the following categories:

- Conceptual Issues
- Women's Movements
- Youth Movements
- Social Awakening and Revivalism
- Religious Movements
- Educational Movements

Although authors have not adopted a uniform methodology to present their ideas but a common pattern is reflected in their themes and issues.

We are grateful to the office-bearers of NEICSSR for extending the moral and material support for making this publication possible.

July 1998

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Perspectives in the Study of Social Movements

M.N. KARNA

The study of social movement has assumed a central place in contemporary social science research. The emerging reality provides motivation and context for the growing interest in the subject. Accelerating rate of change is one such factor that has shaped the trend in view of the intimate relationship between social movement and social change. However, the popularity of such studies has not yet produced any well articulated conceptual tool and methodology to handle complex issues involved in social movements. Diverse sets of empirical data are being produced but no rigour is observed in their interpretation and elucidation. In this paper an attempt has been made to clarify some conceptual issues in the study of social movement.

There are four basic issues that constitute the analytical framework of a movement: meaning, source, ideology and organisation.

I

Change is a social reality and so is conflict. Conflict is a universal and general process found in every society be it a highly integrated community or an open pluralistic group. As such, every social system develops its own mechanism to resolve conflicts. But the structural contradictions in such systems often become so dominant and the available mechanisms so inadequate in accommodating change and resolving conflicts that a strong desire is felt for transforming the system among those who become conscious and sensitive to such contradictions. Under the circumstances the enlightened group

organises itself around certain ideas with a programme of action for effecting change in the existing system. Such a process of organisation initiates a movement.

Rudolf Heberle defines a social movement as a collective effort to transform established relations within a particular society.¹ Neil Smelser views social movement as directly oriented towards a change in social institutions and social norms.² A formulation by M.S.A. Rao suggests that a social movement essentially involves sustained collective mobilisation through either informal or formal organisation and is generally oriented towards bringing about change in the existing system of relationships. Rao considers ideology as an important component of a social movement.³ A recent attempt to explain movements focuses primarily on the relationship between social movement and social change.⁴ There are four fundamental premises in this formulation. They are: social movements are essentially related to social change and therefore to social structure; social movements are products of a social structure and hence emerge out of certain conditions in the social structure; social movements themselves have a recognizable structure in terms of which they are the products. Mukherji thus argues that 'these premises provide the perspective for relevant information on the phenomenon of social mobilisation directed towards some change.'⁵

A movement as an instrument of change is however different from ambitious process of mobility. While the latter puts emphasis on the functional unity of the system and maintains just the existing social order, the former stresses on contradictions that lead to social transformation. Social movements in this sense are active agents of change.

It is clear that there is a considerable agreement among scholars on two basic elements of social movements—collective mobilisation and change orientation. However, if sustainability as a process is taken as a crucial factor in a movement two other distinct elements—ideology and organisation become equally significant. Thus, a proper understanding of the meaning of social movement must incorporate all these basic elements.

The question of 'meaning of movement' is to classify social movements. Given the very generality of the concept and its multi-dimensional nature, social movements have been categorised on the

basis of numerous criteria. Based on the character and implications of the commitment to change, organisational mode and strategy and the 'constituency' of the population which accords the movement normative commitment and participation, Paul Wilkinson adopts the following main types:⁶

1. Religious movement, millenarism and sect
2. Movements of rural and urban discontent
3. Nativist, nationalist and race movements
4. Imperialism and pan-movements
5. Class and occupational interest movements
6. Moral protest and reformist movements
7. Revolutionary, resistance and counter-revolutionary movements
8. Intellectual movement
9. Youth movement
10. Women's movement

M.S.A. Rao classifies movements into three broader types—reform, transformation and revolutions.⁷ Reform movements may be identified with partial changes in the value system and consequential changes in the quality of relationships. In contrast, transformative movements aim at bringing about middle level structural changes in the traditional distribution of power. Finally, revolution is identified with radical changes in the totality of social and cultural systems. The need to classify movements by changes they intend to bring about has been advocated by Mukherji.⁸ Based on this criterion he suggests three divisions—social movement, revolutionary movement and quasi-movements. 'Any collective mobilisation for action directed explicitly towards an alteration or transformation of the structure of a system can be properly understood as a social movement. When the collective mobilisation aims at effecting wide-ranging and far-reaching changes in the major institutional systems comprising the whole society, we can rightly term it a revolutionary movement. Collective mobilisations aimed at changes within a system are quasi-movements.'⁹ T.K. Oommen's typology is based on the process of movement crystallisation, the life-cycle and the phases of social movements. For him, movements are charismatic, ideological and organisational.¹⁰

II

The second major component of the analytical aspect of a movement is its origin and source. Under what structural conditions a movement is born? What historical circumstances facilitate a social movement? Which factors determine the nature and form of a movement? Answer to these questions will highlight the basic issues being analysed in the present context.

Currently, three popular explanations are in vogue about the genesis of a movement. These are: the theory of relative deprivation primarily advocated by Merton and Runciman; the strain theory propounded by Smelser; and the revitalisation theory presented by Wallace. The concept of relative deprivation was originally developed by the authors of *American Soldier* in 1949 but subsequently Merton applied it to explicate the reference group theory and social mobility.¹¹ The idea of deprivation is germane to the theories of Marx and Engels as well. Elaborating relative deprivation as a negative discrepancy between legitimate expectations and existing reality, Aberle treats it as a central issue in the study of social movements.¹² Relative deprivation in this sense has been analysed in terms of material possession, status, behaviour and worth. In his oft quoted book *Why Men Rebel*, Ted Gurr explains relative deprivation as a gap between expectations and perceived capabilities involving economic conditions, political power and social status.¹³

The basic idea in all these explanations of relative deprivation is that when the perceived deprivation of social collectivities is mobilised for transforming the current order, movements emerge within the limits of their goals and objectives. The leading bases of categorising objectives may be religion, caste, tribe, language, region, economy and so on.

The origin of social movement in terms of structural-functional framework has been discussed by Smelser in his strain theory.¹⁴ To him, structural strain is the basic source of collective behaviour which acts at different levels of norms, values and mobilisation. Under the conditions of strain the situation is assessed by the people which is crystallised in the form of a generalized belief. By explaining the situation through such a generalised belief a condition of movement is created in a social system.

A question may be raised here whether social movements occur only under the unfavourable and negative conditions of deprivation and strain. Wallace's revitalisation theory is a departure in this context.¹⁵ The notion of revitalisation movements articulated by him shows that social movements may be launched by the people with the sharp positive goals of creating a more satisfying culture for themselves. As such movements develop out of a deliberate and conscious efforts of members of the collectivities. Naturally, a movement does not only assess and review the prevailing situation but also provides positive plan of action to improve and alter the situation of dispossession and degradation.

Although the explanations of the genesis of social movement discussed above put differential emphasis on various elements, viewed from an integrated perspective, all these points of view can be reduced to a single analytical frame. Accordingly, the emergence of a movement depends upon the sets of factors which may be termed as *basic* and *proximate*.¹⁶ Basic factors are those features of social structure that hold potentialities of discontent and dissatisfaction inherent in them. Proximate factors, on the other hand, are intervening factors which convert these potentialities into consciousness and action. Many of the basic conditions that generate discontent may be present and comparatively unchanging but they manifest only when proximate factors operate and the consciousness of deprivation is actualized. That being the case, sources of a movement are rooted in the structural reality of the system. Thus, a movement may appeal only to some strata or collectivities not to every segment and class of people at the same time. It is the product of historical circumstances and in this sense it is 'diachronic' in nature as it denotes sequence of events or a process in time.¹⁷ A movement is a process not a product *per se*.

III

The processual nature of the movement pre-supposes sustainability in its life-cycle. The sporadic protests and directionless outbreaks may be significant developments in a society but they cannot be termed as movement. Continuity and consistency in mass mobilisation have to be maintained to claim the status of a movement. However, a

movement cannot sustain itself unless it develops its ideological frame and identity. The ways of thinking about demands and strategy, goal-priorities and change-orientation, ends and means constitute the bases of ideology of the movement. Thus, ideology is a system of interacting symbols. It analyses the existential order and develops a 'framework of consciousness'.

An ideological framework articulates aspirations and defines levels of expectations of the people. It shapes beliefs and values and provides direction to the people's response to the challenges. The movement acquires moorings through the interplay of forces generated by an ideology.

Further, it is the ideological framework of the movement that induces legitimacy to the programme of action undertaken to effect change in accordance with the aims and objectives of the movement. In this sense, the movement acquires acceptability and recognition among the people at large. Such a legitimacy engenders strength and tenacity to withstand opposition and resistance to change.

Again, ideology plays a crucial role in generating commitments to the cause and becomes a rallying point to gather people to consolidate the gains of collective mobilisation. Under the conditions, group solidarity is achieved and participants perform various tasks even at the cost of risks of different kinds. Often unity and solidarity among participants are accomplished by exploiting primordial loyalties like caste, kin, linguistic ties and so forth.

Although movements develop their own body of ideas and visionary goals but they are frequently under the powerful influence of well established ideological moulds. Gandhism and Marxism (Leninism), for instance, have actively contributed towards the formulation of concepts, articulation of demands, and in determining ends and means of numerous social and political movements in India. Similarly, the millenarian theme has been the most pronounced feature of tribal movements in different parts of the country. What is being emphasised is that ideology has been accepted as a crucial component of the movement and any exploration into the life-cycle of a movement must highlight facts of the system of thought developed by it.

IV

As noted earlier, social movement is the result of collective mobilisation but it is essentially different from crowd behaviour. No group identity is witnessed in a crowd, while no movement is possible in the absence of such an identity. A crowd is neither organised nor possesses permanency. Social movements, unlike crowd behaviour, attempt to deny and deviate from the prevailing beliefs and practices.

Collective mobilisation as an ingredient of a social movement is too important an area to be neglected. It is not only a salient point in a movement but is intimately connected with the organisational structure and forms of leadership of the movement. When a charismatic leader is the primemover of change, mobilisation tends to be spontaneous. But in case of other types of leadership, patterns of mass mobilisation assume a different character. It is widely recognised that various categories of people are identified and brought together to share responsibilities in accordance with their talents and commitments to the cause of the movement. The leadership positions are also allocated to individual participants on the basis of such qualities and capabilities.

Though the movement more often than not is guided by the centralised leadership but the decentralised democratic leadership may be equally popular strategy. Accordingly, an elaborate structure of local and regional level organisations are to invigorate the movement. These units are required to be formed for mobilising the people, communicating messages and implementing action programmes. While such organisations are formed on the conscious decision and commitment to the movements' aims and objectives, they also express the collective will of the people among whom they are accepted.

The functional division of tasks is the most common pattern in movements. These tasks are assigned to different units at different levels. Such a distribution of responsibilities also corresponds with the status, honour and position of members of the movement. In certain cases, the position and status of participants depend upon personal qualities and commitments of individual recruits. But the leadership may make use of primordial loyalties such as caste, language, religion, region as well to unite people for the cause.

There is another important aspect in organisation of a movement.

While the formal structure of leadership and organisation sustains a movement but at the same time there is a danger of division and split within the organisation due either to personal rivalry of leaders or ideological clash among various shades of opinion. The split caused by ideological fight is particularly visible in 'progressive' movements which believe in radical change and transformation. But such a possibility is relatively limited in a movement that defines its ideology primarily in terms of millennium.

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Structural Bases of Social Movements in the North-Eastern Region

B.S. BUTOLA

“Runningwater is never stale and door-hinge is never worm-eaten” means that constant motion prevents the inroads of germs and other organism.

—Mao: Criticism and Self Criticism

Today, the study of social movements in general and in the North-Eastern Region in particular has acquired both textual as well as contextual significance. The study of these movements is being attempted in an ideological and philosophical background where capitalism feels triumphant and resurged not because it has succeeded in overcoming its own inherent internal contradictions and limitations but, mainly because the alternative system suggested by “Marxism”, “Communism” and, “Socialism” have temporarily relapsed and relegated to the back seats at least in their former strong holds in the Socialist Block including the Soviet Union. Thus, the triumph of Capitalism fundamentally begins with a negative note on the happenings in the World History.

Secondly, today the “post Modern” and the “post Structural” ideological and philosophical frameworks of “Sans Ideologies” have acquired wider popularity and acceptance as the methods of social analyses including the study of social movements in which the input of ideology is an over arching structural reality. Thus, the attempts of the “post Modernist” and “post Structural” thinkers if remained unchallenged then these are likely to reduce the most intense and supreme human creations (activities) as articulated through the various social movements to an exercise of “Social Quantisation” or an expression

of the atomised, discrete and dehumanised individuals without any interconnection, coherence and social relevance. In fact, the logical framework and philosophical moorings provided by the “post Modernist” thinkers is capitalist ideology in two ways i.e. in its inductive and counter inductive approaches as these only articulate the structural ingredients of a degenerated and moribund capitalism where treatment is given on piecemeal bases such that the role of parts is overplayed and the importance of the system is undermined and disregarded. These, while highlighting the specific, neglect the universal i.e. the class relations and structural bases of everything including social movements and science and technology etc. so that the unity and solidarity among the constituent units is not allowed to take place. It is, therefore, imperative to take these two factors into consideration while phenomenon like the study of social movements in the north-eastern region is under consideration.

The north-eastern region of India comprising the seven sister states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura is perhaps one of the most sensitive regions of the country. The sensitivity of the region has got greatly enhanced by its increasing strategic location at the interface of diametrically opposite ideological regimes, value systems, heterogeneous cultural landscapes, and currents of civilisations. Moreover, multiplicity of cultures, material existence, economic lives along with the phenomenal intra-spatial variations in the form of dense forest, high hills and narrow valleys, mighty barriers created by the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries, torrential rains leading to frequent inundation of the low lying areas and recurrent tremors due to geotectonic movements in the absence of adequate means of intra and inter regional linkages like roads, rails, airways and communications have also contributed in keeping people too much confined to their narrow territorial and parochial imperatives with little scope for inner dynamism and change. On the name of development brought in largely through the externally induced mechanisms ever sharpening process of socio-economic differentiation is tearing people away from their sloggish existence and has flung them into the culture of spuriously enhanced consumerism by intensifying the struggle for status without creating a material base to sustain it. Thus, loss of identities, sense of cultural alienation and psychic nomadism etc. have increasingly

become the ways of life of the numerous socio-cultural groups peopling the region by leaving behind their rich and vivid cultural heritage.

The spread of modern education without accompanying compatible changes in the socio-economic bases of people's life in the region has not only created a rupture in the traditional and modern ways of life but, it has also inculcated aspirations and ambitions among the people with non-existent opportunities available for their realisation. Spread of the imperfect education has brought in the Parkinson's syndrome on a social scale in the entire region. It is characterised by proportionate increase in the ailment with the additional instalments of treatment given to the victim. Meaning thereby, the spread of education increases the levels of ignorance and the so-called skill formation increases their economic and social redundancies. This problem if not attended timely and appropriately then it is and will breed frustration and alienation among the people particularly the literate and the educated ones. When such a phenomenon attains a social dimension it becomes a potential base for questioning the existing hegemony and building the counter hegemony which ultimately gets articulated through social unrest and need among the people to act more directly. Thus, it prepares the preliminary or nascent stage of social movements.

Various scholars, thinkers, administrators, planners and social workers have attributed these and many other factors for the emergence and continuation of social movements in the region and consequently various models are formulated for comprehending and taking appropriate remedial measures to check the spread of such movements. To name only a few of such models and theories the "theory of relative deprivation (Merton, Runciman, Marx and Engles) including internal colonialism, peripheral and late capitalism, distorted and dependent development, lopsided and uneven development and underdevelopment. Theory of revitalisation including the nationality question, sub-nationalism, right of self determination, complexities and cultures, cultural identities, a historical necessity and an inviability due to the ongoing processes of transition, theory of strain (Smelser), including demographic aggression, foreign hand, cultural imperialism, conflict and tension resolution and finally theory of environmental conditioning, including relative isolation and incompatible accessibility

and environmental determinism etc.” are currently in vogue as far as the analyses of social movements in the north-eastern region is concerned.

These and many more models and schools of thoughts have made valuable contributions in understanding and analysing the morphology, anatomy and physiology of the various social movements in the region and the author feels deeply indebted to them. However, it is worth mentioning here that most often it is observed that the models formulated and mentioned above have also created confusions (intentional or otherwise) and diluted the serious attempts developed for a critical understanding particularly about the generic nature of these movements along with their interconnections and thus hampered the processes of proper diagnosis, pathologies and also suggestive remedies for the same.

The present paper attempts to highlight the generic base and interconnecting linkages of the social movements by differentiating the social movements on the basis of their form and content and also their dialectical interrelationships. In doing so, it is felt that though the various social movements taking place in the north-eastern region have maintained strong apparent differences in their forms, timings, areas of influence, ideological orientations and mass base yet, these have always maintained a strong underlying unity in their content, and material roots. Most of the models mentioned above have only encapsulated their apparent forms or manifestations and a critical quarry needs to be taken up in revealing the underlying unity of the same and if possible come up with appropriate diagnoses.

Social movement is a characteristic feature of transition. The processes of transition could be as fundamental and broad based as the transition from one mode of living and material relations to another through the forceful overthrow of existing relations of production by the revolutionary struggle of the contending classes and it could be as peaceful, slow and limited as change of governments through elections.

Social movements in the north-eastern region have articulated all the possible permutations and combinations between these two extremes of transitional processes. But, ironically enough these movements have so far been understood and analysed largely through the factors external to its political, economic and social formations. The structural analyses of these movements reveal that the state, its

nature, role and relationship in this region is invariably the most common element and concern of all the social movements. All the movements have either defied the codes of conduct laid down by the state or these have undermined its significance. Modern state finds no place in the psyche of most of the cultural groups in the region. On its part the state too continues to find out the missing organic links between itself and the regional political economy and social formations. There exists an enormous gap between the state and the masses and the intermediate links in the form of civil society and the ideological state apparatuses also the most important legitimising and the only institutional network are either conspicuously absent or they are in the initial stages of their evolution. This does not only bring the state in its most repressive form to the direct contact of the people but people also understand and equate the state as the repressive state apparatus only. State in this region constantly and continuously faces the crises of legitimacy and consent which becomes difficult due to conspicuous absence of civil society and ideological state apparatuses. For getting the same (legitimacy and regular consent) the state most often resorts to the use of repressive organs of the state and which is always and everywhere opposed, resented and resisted by the people both overtly and covertly. This creates the basis for the emergence of social movements in the region. The structural analysis of these movements helps us to understand and analyse the linkages between the forms and content of these movements. Some of important ones can be as follows:

Transition, Structural Adjustment and Social Movements

It is well known that the post-colonial countries are faced with the general problems of transition in every walk of life and this process apart from being a smooth and non-violent one is very tedious and violent. The intensity of these difficulties have got multiplied in the so-called areas of internal colonial domination. The north-eastern region of India is the prime example of this type. This region is facing a secular transition from the tribal territorial imperative to national consciousness, from lineage to bourgeois democratic state, and from subsistence economy to high scale consumerism etc. The net outcome of the entire process is that so much is happening within

such a short span of time that aspirations among the masses are arousing much faster than the material assets available to realise these. Consequently the people are faced with complete bewilderment. Forces both progressive as well as retrogressive are trying to harness the sentiments and anguish of these bewildered people for projecting and realising their notion of change. Most often it is seen that a centralist state comes into conflict with both the progressive and the retrogressive forces, thus, most of the social movements in the region are largely due to the centralist position taken by the state in handling various problems in the region. At times the state collaborates, compromises and confronts these forces and this ambivalence on the part of the state is an important reason behind most of the social movements in the region.

State and Civil Society in the North-Eastern Region

Modern state unlike the Medieval one has not only become much wider and broad-based but it also ensembles a host of other apparatuses of ideological as well as repressive control of the society. Relative autonomy of the state in relation to the underlying economic structure as well as from the personal control of the propertied classes have become the hallmark of late capitalist development. But, it does not mean to say that the bourgeois capitalist state has no class character or is/has become a supra class phenomenon. On the contrary, the relatively autonomous state is yet another structural adjustment made by the propertied classes in perpetuating their class rule by incurring minimum risk of directly confronting the oppressed classes. It is particularly relevant in the context of changed class relations where the state instead of being an organ of class rule epitomises the hegemonic control of the ruling classes over the other classes in which the role of the civil society and the ideological state apparatuses have become more significant. Hegemonic state is the characteristic feature of modern bourgeois rule. But, in societies like the north-eastern region of India where the civil society as well as the ideological apparatus of the state are still in the nascent stages and the hegemonic control of the state is still not a dominant form and in its place only the repressive organs of the state are becoming stronger and more prevalent. Such a change is most often retaliated by the

masses in creating counter hegemony and such developments are potentially the basis of social movements in the region.

Primitive Social Formation and Superimposed Alien Superstructure

It is a well known fact that communal ownership of means of production and clan-based division of labour is most prevalent in most parts of the north-eastern region. Stratification of society along the lines of economic differentiation is still in the initial stages of its evolution. Under such prevailing situations the imposition of bourgeois democratic state and its associated superstructural apparatuses always find themselves incompatible to the underlying economic base and as a result there exists a void between the two and lack of communication and dialogue between the base and the superstructure including the state has become quite pronounced in the region. Therefore, the modern state finds itself irrelevant in relation to the underlying social formation and thus on its own the state tries to establish the dialogue by using the repressive organs of the state. This is an important factor in spreading the discontent among the masses and are vulnerable to different methods of its articulation including social movements.

Conclusion

On the basis of the forgoing discussion it can be concluded that the state in the north-eastern region of India is invariably the direct as well as the indirect reference point of all the social movements in the region. It is largely because the state in the region is any thing other than a product of the over all socio-economic changes taking in the region. It is an alien superstructure imposed initially under the British and it has consolidated under the independent India too. The superimposed state has specialised in perfecting the repressive organs of the state which in turn has been resisted by the masses. Thus, creating congenial atmosphere for the rise of numerous social movements in the region.

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A Study of Youth Movements as Social Movements

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The usage of the term 'social movement' had been traced back to a work on French Revolution entitled "The History of the Social Movement in France from 1789-1850" by a Danish historian Lorenz von Stein in 1852. In this work he conceptualised a social movement in the form of a collective action by the people (masses) in order to bring about changes in the conditions of society.

Since the time of von Stein social psychologists and sociologists have joined the historians in the study of social movements. With the increasing volume of empirical studies we find an expansion in the defining characteristics and the scope of this concept ever since it was first proposed about a century and a half ago. What has, of course, not changed in this concept is the notion of collectivity and the change-orientation of the collective action. Opinions, however, differ on other indicators of social movements—genesis, goal, recruitment, organisation, strategies or tactics employed to achieve the goals, types or forms of movements—to name some.

The issues with which social psychologists are particularly concerned are (i) the type of people constituting the social movements; (ii) the psychological factors motivating the people to join the movement; and (iii) the techniques of recruitment. They argue that only emotionally disturbed and socially maladjusted people join the social movements. Psychologists such as Eric Fromm and Theodore Adorne classified these people as having "authoritarian" personality structures.

According to Cantrill the discontented people of the society find support from like-minded people in a movement and the movement

itself becomes a source of need-fulfillment.

Both these views, i.e., classification of personality types and need-fulfillment function, have been severely criticised on the basis of several empirical studies.

Sociologists, as against the social psychologists look for genesis of social movements within the structure of the society. Three main trends of explanations of structural conditions are discernible in the sociological literature: explanations on the basis of theories of relative deprivation, strain, and revitalisation.

M.S.A. Rao argues that the theories of relative deprivation can be classified according to the themes of social mobility and social conflict. He gives the credit to Merton for developing the mobility theme in the background of his reference group theory. Runcimen carried the Mertonian argument further by combining the reference group theory with the problems of inequalities and social justice. Here social mobility is seen in terms of emulation and positive reference group behaviour.

The other set of theories of relative deprivation lay emphasis on aspect of conflict. Karl Marx can be identified as one of the followers of this approach. The group (class) considering itself to be deprived (exploited) in relation to the group (class) in the position of rulers resorts to conflict (revolution) as a tactic of their movement in order to establish a new order in the society.

It is important to mention here that relative deprivation in itself is not sufficient to generate a movement though the structural conditions leading to relative deprivation are a necessary condition. Sufficient condition is the perception of this state of deprivation by the deprived people. Marx calls it the existence of *true consciousness* among the exploited masses. Ralph Turner argues that even the awareness of the condition of deprivation may exist for centuries without giving rise to a movement. He says that it is necessary for a social movement that the problem is now understood as an *injustice* as against a *misfortune*. In the latter case the people rest content with *charities* or other institutionalised mechanisms in the society *justifying* their conditions of living and their position in the social hierarchy while in the former case the people become aware of their *rights* and now decide to *demand* these rights.

The strain theory treats strains in the normative structure of the

society as the underlying factors responsible for initiating social movements. Neil Smelser advocates that the strains in the normative structure lead to malfunctioning in the system and thus make the people collect as a group to launch a social movement. He proposes a set of five determinants affecting social movements structural conduciveness, structural strains, generalised beliefs, mobilisations, and social control. But Smelser's classification has been found to be too general to study specific social movements and make predictions about it.

Herbert Blumer has seen the development of strains as a result of gradual changes in the values of the people. He calls such changes as cultural drifts. Such cultural drifts give rise to general social movements which in due course of time may become specific social movements. The new set of values may make people dissatisfied with their prevailing conditions of living and then they form a collectivity to bring about a new order of life. Whereas, the general social movements are poorly organised the specific social movements pass through five stages: agitation, *esprit de corps*, morals, ideology and operating tactics.

The revitalization theory believes that social movements evolve certain adaptives (as a positive programme of action) in order to establish equilibrium in the society. Such movements should not be considered as *status quoist* movements. They, on the contrary, launch a programme in order to correct the situation causing dissatisfaction. Wallace visualises the dynamics of revitalization movements in four phases: period of cultural distortion and consequent disillusionment; and period of revitalization.

M.S.A. Rao finds the theory of relative deprivation as most suitable for explaining the genesis of social movements. He argues that this theory centres around the ideas of conflict and cognitive change. It also takes into account the change-orientation of movement. He advocates that this theory should find sociological explanation of relative deprivation rather than psychological explanations in terms of motives.

In our view mere collective action is not sufficient to define a social movement. Care should be taken to examine that this action is neither sporadic nor momentary. On the contrary the collective action should be conceived and sustained in nature. Social movements show

variations in terms of the socio-temporal and cultural contexts in which they emerge and exist. Though movements may generally adopt agitation as a means to achieving their goals yet these should be clearly distinguished from impromptu agitations of a crowd or agitations organised by established political parties through their various frontal organisations at the level of students/youth, women, peasants, or industrial workers, etc.

Other issues besides the genesis of social movements relate to the questions of ideology and identity of the group; mobilisation of the collectivity and leadership of the movement; and the consequences of the collective action.

Ideology is a crucial aspect of any movement and may be treated at par with the genesis of the movement. It should be clearly stated here that the ideology refers to the ideology of the group and *not* that of an individual. The group as a collectivity *must* develop a *true consciousness* about its existing condition in the society and must be ready to gear itself for action against *injustice*. Ideology should also include a line of action and a clearly spelled-out objective or goal. Without these ingredients a social movement may not be different from a sporadic outburst in the form of rebellion, unrest or topical protest ending in negotiation. The group engaged in a social movement acquires an identity by drawing boundary lines with the group against which the struggle is launched.

Mobilisation of the collectivity is linked with the issue of leadership in as much as the issue of leadership is also linked with ideology. Taking the three issues together we are confronted with the basic issue of group formation. It is not sufficient to merely have a numerical membership of people in the group. What is important is to have their active participation. It requires a leadership and a core of activists to initiate the people into the group. The leadership may emerge from within the group itself or it may come from outside the group. The leadership may have, in Weberian terms, any of the three bases of legitimacy. The leader takes upon himself the onus of propounding the ideology, drawing the strategies, and sustaining the direction of the movement. Responsibility is more on the part of the leader coming from outside the group to establish his credibility by manifesting his commitment to the cause of the social movement. What matters, moreover, is whether the leader comes from a cognate

group or from the group against which the social movement is directed.

As most of the social movements have a long-drawn period of struggle the question of sustainability assumes an important consideration. Continuity of action demands constant maintenance of resources—both in terms of human and financial. Moreover, a movement may undergo a process of routinisation and may ultimately transform itself into a bureaucratic organisation participating within the given political system against which it had vowed to fight initially. After all, every social movement has to survive the counter-pressure, from the group against which it operates.

Movements have been classified on the basis of the nature of changes they want to bring about. The changes brought about by the social movements have consequences not only for the group concerned but for the society as a whole in the long run. Societal changes may vary ranging from a situational normative change to a change in the structure of the society.

Now let us discuss the case of Youth Movements as an example. As the name suggests the group involved in the movement consists of those members of society who are characterised as youth on the basis of age-criteria which means that the group members have an ascribed identity in the society. Social psychologists are the single largest group of scholars who have attempted studies under the category of youth movements. Such studies came in vogue in the decades of 1960s with the emergence of 'hippie movement' on the one hand, and with the storming of university campuses by the American and European students respectively on the other hand. Scholars discerned new values cherished by the youth which were explained in terms of 'generation gap' and 'anti-authoritarian/anti-establishment' attitude of the younger generation. Youth movements, by and large, have been studied interchangeably as student movements. In this process one fails to notice two things which are of significance to the sociologists. Firstly, students (particularly those studying in colleges and universities) constitute a minority of the group called Youth. Secondly, students as well as the young constitutes a heterogeneous group in terms of their socio-economic and occupational backgrounds.

When we think of the group called the Youth we are thinking in terms of those who are culturally ascribed this age-status. Beyond this there is nothing in common amongst them. They may be literate

or illiterate, employed or unemployed, married or unmarried. They may have a closer affinity with other groups in the society having different labels.

The case of the students is even more complicated. From the available studies it seems that the tenure of a member in the group of students is very short, may be only five years of university stay in majority of them. Moreover, in most of the societies they enjoy maximum indulgence as compared to other groups. They get financial support from the state in the form of subsidised education as well as they are exempted from discharging various duties in the society. Under these conditions we are confronted with the onerous task of determining their ideology and identity.

Let us examine now the case from the point of collectivisation, leadership, and organisation. Youth as a group is more amorphous and poorly organised than students as a group. Students are designated and accepted as a group in the context of their college or university. Their recruitment to and expulsion from the group is governed by terms and conditions and norms of discipline of the college or university concerned. By virtue of admission as a student they get the membership of an organisation called the Union of the students. Leaders are elected from amongst them as per the constitutional provisions of the Union. Issues are also presented in a ready-made manner so to speak. On the other hand, the group called the youth had no such situation to face. Their heterogeneity, as explained above, does not bind them into a single group with single ideology and identity. They are rather available as a human resource for other groups such as political parties, trade unions etc. We feel tempted to raise a question to ponder over here after making a point on the situation obtained in the northeastern region of India as an illustration. The protracted action of the students union in Assam and the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya since the last parts of 1970s has been on the issue of the influx of foreign nationals in their respective states. The problem is seen in terms of an impending threat of demographic imbalance and consequent usurping of political and economic power by outside ethnic groups. The demand has been articulated in terms of checking the influx of people from outside and deletion of names of some of them (as per the criteria proposed by them) from electoral rolls. In one of our writings our argument was that the Khasi Students

Union acts as vanguard of the society. We find it difficult to accept the activities of the two unions as cases of social movements in strict sociological terms.

Let us now come to the issues of change and social consequences. We can argue in brief, without repetition, that the change-orientation of the collectivity is not towards bringing about change in the status of the group. By and large, the changes appear to be in terms of creating facilities so that the youth/students can participate in the system more easily. Another question we may raise here. What happens to a leader of students organisation/union when he ceases to be a student? Does he now participate in the wider group of youth as a leader or even active core-member? It would be worth attention to analyse the roles played by leaders of the All Assam Students Union as well as the Khasi Students Union of later 1970s. Did they carry on the 'movement' further or became absorbed in the very system as its part against which they had launched a struggle earlier? Does it not raise the issue of counter-pressures of the system as well? We think that it once again supports our contention in our presentation on the Khasi Students Union that the success of their political action depends upon the support of their societies which makes them play the role of vanguard only.

We should keep this in mind that the groups which talk about change or modifications in the society's organisations or inter-relationships are the groups of other type (e.g., political parties) which may draw upon the youth in general or students in particular as their human resource. The group of youth may even provide leaders from amongst its members to serve the cause of these other groups.

In the end we would like to reiterate that for any sociological analysis of youth or student movements we have to subject the collective action of these groups to a rigorous conceptual test.

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Women's Movement in Assam and North-East India: An Assessment

APARNA MAHANTA

In post-independence India a new phase of political mobilisation and activity began in the mid-seventies. It is now generally recognised that along with the civil liberties movement, the Jayaprakash Narayan led students movements, and other popular movements like the anti-price movement in Maharashtra and the Students Movement in Assam, the Women's Movement was phenomenon of the later seventies and early eighties. In the history of the women's movement in India, 1975 International Women's Year was a landmark. In Assam too, as in the rest of the country, this official recognition that women were a disadvantaged group whose lot had to be bettered through concerted efforts by all, including the governments concerned, had a striking impact. It galvanised older women's organisation like *Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti*, the *Mahila Sangha* (local organisation of the NIFW) into action and stock taking. It also inspired the creation of new women's organisation like the *All Assam Lekhika Sanstha* and the *All Assam Lekhika Smarook*, which though primarily literary-cultural organisations, started on the assumption that women were discriminated against in all areas of life (in this case offender was the *All Asom Sahitya Sabha*) and therefore, had to develop their own separate platforms for self-development or '*Prativa-bikash*'.¹

Though 1975 was a catalyst year (which had come appropriately enough on the heels of the publication in 1974 of the Parliamentary Commission on the Status of Women's Report) which started the process of rethinking on the question of women's status, it was the events in the late seventies, the famous Mathura Case and its aftermath that started the activist phase of the Women's movement in India. In

Assam, due to the prevailing social structures, many of the issues taken up by the metropolitan feminists like custodial rape, or dowry deaths later, did not have immediate relevance. In a sense this was due to the 'backwardness' of Assamese society. But what autonomous women's groups like Forum against Rape (later the Forum against Oppression of Women) in Bombay, Saheli in Delhi, established through their campaigns against rape and dowry deaths was the symbolic importance of these individual cases like that of Mathura or Rameeze Bee in articulating the actual conditions of all Indian women as victims of societal and family violence. So it is interesting to note that as early as 1980, the *All Assam Lekhika Smarooth* held in Nalbari organised a seminar on violence against women in which the case of Mathura, Rameeze Be were cited.² It was the spirit of protest and anger against social injustice towards women thus generated that led the *Lekhika Smarooth* to take up a sustained campaign against a local manifestation of discrimination against women—the bar on the entry of women into the Barpeta Namghar.

The Autonomous Women's groups gave a leadership to the Women's Movement in the early phase by focusing on women's issue as an important aspect of the socio-political agenda challenging the prevailing concept of women's 'invisibility' in all spheres of life, legal, political, economic. However, these were mainly confined to the metropolitan centres, small in number and being loosely structured were better in organising short campaigns rather than in creating a sustained women's movement. These activities were mainly among educated, urban women who could articulate the grievances and demands of urban middle class women, but the majority of India's women live in villages and are uneducated. The force of the women's movement could only come from these masses, a fact of which the women's autonomous groups have been always acutely conscious. The need for linkages with larger organised groups like political parties or popular movements, such as nationalist, peasant or Dalit movements have always been stressed and where possible acted upon.

On the other hand, the older political organisations and parties particularly the Communist parties which already had well established women's wings of their own took up the challenge posed by the autonomous women's groups by incorporating women's issues and mobilization in their political agenda. The CPI (ML) groups with

their more libertarian organisational approach started 'independent' women's organisation to mobilise women or women's issues. In Assam too the *Nari Mukti Sanstha* took up several cases of landlord rape and murder of peasant women which created a strong impact on the media. Women were organised on a large scale and a magazine to raise consciousness started.³ Other independent loosely affiliated party women's organisations like the *Sadai Asom Nari Sanstha* took up the same pattern of activities.

Though these organisations had large rural following, the lead was taken by urban educated and often working women in raising the consciousness of the general masses of women through publishing magazines by and for women that would provide a platform for women to raise their demands and discuss their problems. Among these magazines are *Lekhika Aideus Jonaki Bat*, *Ardha Akash*, *Sachetana*, *Sataari* published by various women's organisations. Seminar and discussions have also been organised, following the lead of the autonomous women's groups campaigns against local cases of rape and dowry deaths, which in the last decade has shown a significant rise due to the rising urban pressure, as well as the unsettled conditions due to insurgency and state efforts to control them, have been organised.

In Assam and the entire north-east, there has been an unprecedented surge of popular anti-state movements within the last two decades. In Nagaland, Manipur, later also in Assam there have been militant movements. There has also been the democratically organised popular movements for state autonomy in Meghalaya, Karbi Anglong and Boro areas in Assam. The participation of women in popular mass movements goes without saying, particularly in the north-east where women are more actively involved in economic and social activity. The impact of such movements on the development of the women's movements needs to be assessed. To begin with a very personal example, in 1983 March 8, I along with some women friends, published a women's magazine, *Aideor Jonaki Bar* with the aim of raising women's consciousness and creating a movement, taking the cue from the popular *Manusi*. At that time, with the 1983 Assam Election, Assam was in flames at the height of the anti-foreigner movement. Many looked askance at us. When the nation was in peril why need we think of women separately? However I like to think that

our stand was ultimately vindicated. As the Assam Movement progressed it became clear that women, who were spontaneously joining the movement, had to be organised separately in order to play an effective role. Women's coordinating committees were formed in places like Tezpur, Tinsukia, Guwahati and eventually an All Assam Convention of Women's Coordinating Committee was held in August 1984 and an All Assam Women's Coordinating Committee was formed to carry on the objectives of the Assam Movement. Other auxiliary women's groups with names like *Mula Gabharu Sanstha* and *Assam Jagrata Mahila Parishad* came into existence supporting the movement. In other mass popular autonomy movements and the Bodoland Movement it has also been thought expedient at some point to form separate women's organisations to mobilise women to carry on the wider objective of the struggle, such as the KNCA (*Karbi Nimso Chinto Achui*) Karbi Women's Progressive Association and the Tribal Women's Welfare Organisation. With the experience of the Assam Movement behind, where the very loose structure of the women's organisations failed to make any significant impact raising the consciousness of the women, these newer organisations are better organised in terms of organisation as well as in the matter of ideological direction. The Karbi Women's Organisation as an offshoot of the ASDC has of course the ideological support of the CPI (ML). The Boro Women's movement also at the initial stages was helped in the matter of organisation and ideological direction by the *Nari Mukti Sanstha*, an affiliate of the CPI (ML) (Bhaskar Nandi Group). Latterly a section is under the tutelage and in association with the (KNCA) and the *Sadou Asom Nari Sanstha*, an affiliate of the CPI (ML) (Liberation). Better organised than the organisations of women that came into being during the Assam Movement, which never attained any independent standing, these newer organisations though also under the direct tutelage of the parent organisation and so wholly subscribing to their general political aims, also take up women's issues such as rape, family violence and so on.

The Indian women's movement can be said to have developed from the Mathura rape case. The feminist slogan 'the personal is political' appeared to be exemplified in the case of Mathura, where the rape of an individual laid bare the whole oppressive structure of society and state, in which not just one Mathura but a whole class of

men and women were victims of state and social oppression. So the outcry against the rape of Mathura was an outcry against the whole oppressive state structure. In the post-Mathura feminist discourse the state oppression on the tribal people of Assam had been one of the items often referred to. Ever since the Naga insurgency of the sixties the rapes of tribal women by the Indian Military has often been cited as instances of state repression and terrorization of the tribal peoples of the region. During the Assam Movement, the insurgency in Manipur, the Bodoland demand movement, and lately during the militant ULFA activities, rape of tribal and mainly rural women by army and police personnel in the course of duty have become focal point of the movements. During the Assam movement huge rallies were held in Guwahati and other places to protest against the rapes of rural women in Kamrup district by the Army; the Bhumuka rape case in Kokrajhar became the centre of a widespread agitation led by the tribal women's welfare organisation and the *Nari Mukti Sanstha*, the sexual exploitation of women in Oinam district in Manipur has been taken up legally by the Coordinating Committee in Oinam. However, the rapes of women in these cases have been used to mobilise not just women alone, but to draw attention to the whole political issues. In the women's movement, rape is a social as well as a political issue. Rape stands for the oppression of women in general and thus it has a strong emotive appeal for organizing women to protest against social oppression and assert their dignity as well as human beings. Mathura was not just an illiterate village girl but stood for all women, helpless against the might of the state and patriarchal society. But when the rape case are politicised, this kind of broad gender identification is side-stepped and a partisan elements enter, making identification difficult. The city women who visited the areas of North Kamrup where the rape took place sympathised with the victims opining that rather than they are looked down upon they should be given the honour of martyrs as they had sacrificed what was dearer to them than life, their chastity, for their country',⁴ but did not feel that with them this was an assault on their human dignity. When the Dhumuka rapes occurred it appeared as if only the Boro people should protest; the non-Boro people were hesitant to offer any open sympathy to the victims for fear that this would be construed as sympathy for the Boro cause. The same is true of the Manipur cases.

Rather than the women's identity it is the ethnic or sectarian identity of the victims that is predominantly focused on.

One of the prime contributions of the women's movement is solidarity which transcends barriers of race, locality, caste and to some extent class also. These differences are huge but a major premise of the women's movement is the common nature of the oppression of women rooted as it is in the patriarchal structure of society which are also ultimately responsible for the caste and class systems. The whole issue is very complex and facile generalisations are out of place, but it seems that contrary to feminist assumptions that gender discrimination is the key issue, it is felt, in an ethnically complex region, that gender identity takes second place to ethnic identity. The tribal fear of outsiders, justified in this context though it may be, is a barrier to a more progressive ideology positing common human goals. Probably until the tribal people feel more sure of their identity it will be difficult for them to make common cause with the oppressed sections in non-tribal society.

So far as one can see, the women's movement in Assam has yet to develop a distinct identity of its own. There has been a great development of women's consciousness regarding the wrongs and demands of women, mainly through the efforts of the women's magazines, as well as the numerous local agitations against dowry deaths and rapes led by local and state level women's organisations like the *Mahila Sangha*, *Nari Mukti Sanstha*, *Sadai Asom Nari Sanstha*, all associated with leftist political parties, as well as by non-party local women's organisations of the Mahila Samity type. But all these agitations and programmes have remained confined and failed to take off into a full-fledged movement. May be it is a weakness of the women's movement in India as a whole. The autonomous women's groups with a feminist orientation tend to remain small. The larger women's organisations with mass followings, are usually the affiliates of large political organisations and parties, are naturally subservient to the interests of the parent party or organisation, and though there is a lot of talk of 'independent' women's organisations this does not in practice work out. It seems that women as a group have yet to develop the organisational and managerial skills to sustain any large organisation or movement on their own and totally independent of men. In the north-east women are forced to be

subordinate both from external pressure of the men-folk to conform to the community norms as well as due to lack of self-confidence. This may sound paradoxical in the north-east in states like Meghalaya and Manipur whose women are economically and educationally advanced. But in fact there is a strong tradition barring women's participation in politics in both these states which consequently have a poor showing of women even in conventional electoral politics. There have been strong woman's movement for instance in the Nupilan movements and later the anti-liquor and anti-drug movements in Manipur but these have been primarily social rather than political in nature, without a modern sense of political identity. Even in Assam where women's wide scale participation in the AASU led anti-foreigner movement is proudly pointed at, the participation was more spontaneous and instinctive ('to save our bous') rather than politically motivated and organised round a true sense of identity either as oppressed women or as a member of an oppressed nationality. When after the signing of the Assam Accord the AGP Government was elected to office, in only two out of 126 of the Assembly seats did the AGP nominate women. The two AGP MLAs are, interestingly, of tribal origin, one a Boro. Nor was there much protest at the time by women or others of this poor representation after all the effort of women to make the movement successful. Nor was there any attempt by women during or after the movement to influence or criticise the AASU or AGP policy. The sense of disillusionment of Assam women with the movement is voiced by two women writer writing on the movement:

"The women who took active part in the movement now regret they have nothing to look back upon and nothing to look forward to. The future seems bleak. The movement that took many young lives and marred the academic atmosphere of the state was of no avail. Instead of going ahead, the growth of the state has been retarded. The present government, an outcome of the movement, has become individualistic. They have retracted on all assurances."⁵

It is apparent from the tone of these remarks that the women of Assam took part in the movement as passive participants, who went where they were led and now regret their actions. This does not auger

much for the level of their political consciousness. The organisations formed during the movement are now there just in name and have nothing to show.

There has been an attempt during the last few years chiefly by the leftist oriented women's organisations like *Mahila Sangh* and *Sadai Asom Nari Sanstha* to develop a movement on the basis of police and military atrocities on innocent people in the name of combating terrorism. Quite recently a large contingent of women protesting army atrocities in Morigao was lathi-charged by police and many women were injured. The CPI had organised the rally. But though there were write-ups and protests in the papers and notices in the Assembly, there were no widespread protests. The partisan and sectarian interests in these efforts is all too obvious and hence they remain purely local and spontaneous affairs and fail to generate a popular response and involvement. Efforts by other women's organisations like *Sadai Asom Nari Sanstha* to generate popular movements on the basis of rapes and dowry deaths fail to generate wide response. Even feminist groups in Delhi like *Manusi* have begun now to question the basis and efficacy of some of the earlier issues taken up by the women's movement and particularly the methods used to tackle them. So very often the newspapers' report alleged dowry deaths and rape cases. Feminists have discovered that taking up individual cases, though initially important in rousing women's consciousness, are ultimately time-consuming and futile. It is more important to tackle the issues at the level of policy-making, social education and general empowerment of women, that is enabling them to be economically, socially and mentally independent. While feminists have emphasised the inadequacies of liberal and even marxist ideology to grapple with the problem of women's oppression, an alternative ideology that will provide a platform to a broad-based, strong and independent women's movement which will focus on women's status in society along side and not in subordination to other broad-based movements is yet to make its appearance. As elsewhere, in the north-east region too the women's movement remains fragmented, hesitant and localised. The general level of women's and in general society's consciousness of women's issues has risen, but women have still to develop the strong sense of identity as women necessary for self-assertion through collective and individual efforts.

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Changing Profile of Women in Arunachal Pradesh: Role of Women as an Instrument of Social Movement

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Webster's Encyclopaedic Dictionary defines social movement as the act, process or result of actions or activities, as of a person or a body of persons for achieving a generalised common goal in which the person or persons live in companionship or in a community rather than in isolation. To put it in a very simple and non-dogmatic way, it will suffice to say that these movements may be initiated by a single person, a few leaders or it may be a grass root movement by the people as a whole. The changes brought about by such movements may be in an isolated aspect or in all aspects of the society, such as social, cultural, political, educational, religious, legal and economic.

The movement of a given society in the ladder of social mobility, both progressive and retrogressive, is therefore directly interlinked with the rise and operation of both indigenous and exogenous forces. The emergence of indigenous forces of change takes place in an evolutionary process and commonly in the long run, unless and until there is a major geo-social convulsion. On the other hand, the extraneous forces may bring in fast changes in a very short span of time even in a stagnant society.

In case of Arunachal Pradesh with its typical geo-social and economic set up, the latter theoretical formulation fits in well to explain the dimension of social mobility of women in the last four decades after independence.

In any society, women constitute a significant pillar of social change. In a caste-ridden rigid society, the prospects of women

contributing significantly to social change is comparatively bleak, but in the tribal society of Arunachal Pradesh, the chances appear bright and are in the positive, yet there are spatio-temporal variations. Moreover, a set theory of development formulated and planned outside is likely to be questioned on grounds of regional socio-economic relevance.

Arunachal Pradesh was practically kept in isolation till independence with very negligible social changes by any kind of process that may be termed as movement. The process, therefore, was started in the 50s from a zero base, i.e. from primitive mode of production and exchange relation. Therefore, as an effective instrument of raising people's consciousness to the level of their participation in the process of development, various factors like education, health, hygiene, etc. had to be given the prime focus in the last forty years of planning and development.

In an attempt to understand the degree of the influence of these factors, I have tried to assess the change by taking one of the variables, i.e. percentage of female literacy to total literacy in the state. By the time of the last census the percentage of growth of female literacy has been tremendous. Between 1971-81 the growth rate of female literacy has been 197.04 percent while between 1981-91, it has been about 185.14 percent. Though calculated sex-wise, percentage of female literacy is still far short of overall male literacy, but the growth rate in female literacy has far outpaced the growth in male literacy.

The rise in the literacy level is, therefore, an indicator of women's mobility in the ladder of social hierarchy in Arunachal Pradesh.

Here in the socio-economic perspective, the spread of education and growth in literacy among women raises certain basic questions to understand the position of women in the contemporary society:

- i) Are educated women free from social drudgeries and conventions?
- ii) Is the existing social system showing signs of change under the impact of development process, particularly that of women literacy?
- iii) How far educated/literate women are successful in raising the consciousness of women towards the level of thinking in the primitive tribal society? and

- iv) How far this has led to ascertaining and exercising their rights in their occupational mobility and freedom, and whether this is a rising trend?

The present paper is an attempt to probe the aforesaid questions. It further seeks to examine the stress and strain in the tribal society of Arunachal Pradesh that has emerged as a result of development in the last four decades.

Before probing into the particular questions, a review of the customary status of women among the tribals in Arunachal, at this point, would be relevant in order to highlight the contour lines of their position vis-a-vis with their male counterparts. For convenience of study of the spatial variation, a few prominent tribes from different parts of Arunachal have been selected.

To start with, the Aka society is organised on patriarchal system with law of primogeniture and other traits of patriarchy. The family is mostly nuclear. However, polygamy is practised by the chief and wealthy persons. Polyandry hardly exists in the Aka society. At the time of marriage, the system of paying bride price or free service in lieu thereof is prevalent universally among the Akas. Women-folk are subjected to the drudgeries of family life and are deprived of inheritance, property rights and free and equal participation in public life.

In the Monpa society, the position of the women is comparatively better than that of the Akas and Nishis. In the field of production and exchange relations and their cultural attainments, the Monpas are a step ahead of their neighbouring brethren. The usual domestic unit in the Monpa society is a nuclear family. Polygamy and polyandry are least existent and are mostly the fancy and realities for the rich and poor people respectively. While bride price is nominal, a normal dowry system with linkage to the social status of the family is in existence. Inside family, women enjoy respect and reverence but in public, they are not equal to the men. Their contribution to family economy is no less than menfolk, yet they remain a second rate species in the male dominated Monpa society.

The Nishis, a major tribe of the Lower Subansiri district, are a patriarchal, clannish people. Among the Nishis, while monogamy is prevalent, polygamy is held in high esteem. Polygamy for the Nishis is just not the fancy of the rich, it is rather an economic union. More

wives means more additional working hands. Women are considered economic assets for the family. When men are busy, hunting and preparing for war, the women-folk perform a multiple of household work, including food gathering, cultivation and cattle rearing. They are subjected to the height of family drudgeries.

The Apatani society has a comparatively better set up for an honourable living for women. Even though society is patriarchal the women at home enjoy honour and freedom of a rightful participant in family life. Polygamy and polyandry is not normally allowed. Freedom of choice in marriage is allowed within social chores.

The Galongs of West Siang district have the unique distinction of practising a system of fraternal polyandry. Even though the Galong society is well-balanced in sex-ratio, the system continues only due to the burden of heavy bride price on a poor young man and his family members. Monogamy and polygamy also continue side by side with polyandry. Though the society is male dominated, the women enjoy the privilege of honourable partner at home.

The Khampti society is monogamous as a rule with the exception of chiefs and wealthy persons enjoying the privilege of plurality of wives. The Idu Mishmis practise a polygamous union with each wife having her own separate establishment in the house. A number of wives are the denominators of a man's wealth. The Noctes with their system of chieftainship and strong patriarchal lineage practise monogamy in common, with the exception of chiefs. With the chiefs, polygamy is a custom and a matter of pride and social dignity. Wealthy persons going for polygamy are guided by the motive of having more hands for agriculture.

To sum up, the customary position of women in the traditional Arunachal society of different tribes remain full of social drudgeries under the burden of a primitive mode of production and exchange relations and a hostile geography and terrain. The monolithic patriarchal structure in almost every tribe gives the men-folk the advantage of establishing their superiority over the women. While in public life the women are forced to be at the background, at home they are duty bound to perform every bit of household chores. Most of the tribal societies of Arunachal Pradesh inherit an ethos of inter and intra-tribal feuds, which in the past warranted the menfolk to remain always in a state of war preparation limits the women to cater

to all the needs of the households. A primitive economy sustained by hunting, jhumming and frequent migration also have laid fetters in the mobility of women. On the top of these handicaps is the total absence of the emergence of any intraneous forces of social change till recently.

Hence, it appears that the position of women does not bear much of a difference from that of an agrarian society in any other part of our country, but due to extreme geo-social condition the impact of social backwardness has been a perpetual factor unlike that of other areas where social movements for women and women rights have taken a prominent shape. In this background understanding the changing profile of women in Arunachal today becomes more significant. Firstly, there has been an immense change in the social attitude towards women as a whole. The continuous rise in the rate of female literacy is perhaps the most significant example, whereby, the parents and guardians have conceived the idea of importance of education for females and have led them out from the agrarian labour conditions. Though the percentage is very low, compared to other states, and is limited to town or adjacent areas only, nonetheless, this is important as these literate women can become, and are becoming feedbacks for their rural counterparts. Coming to the second aspect regarding occupation and mobility it is very clear that unlike the caste ridden social bindings about working of women outside the house that exists very strongly particularly among the higher castes, the position of a tribal woman is different—while looking after the family, she also has to burden herself with the responsibility of earnings as well. As such she has been a constant working hand in the agricultural fields and at home. But it has never been accepted as a contribution, rather has been taken as a duty to be done under compulsion. This situation too is fast changing. Today, most of the educated/literate women seldom go to the fields and a tremendous shift from primary occupation to tertiary occupation is evident, particularly rise of number of women employees in the government offices. It, therefore, shows that a gradual movement has been occurring in the ladder of hierarchy as far as economic dependence is concerned. This has consequently brought in economic freedom, which has in turn enabled them to think and create awareness, about their rights to come up to the level of their counterparts in other states.

But, again this trend is prominently seen in the urban areas and among the migratory groups only, while in rural areas this is very very negligible in comparison. However, in an overall analysis, both education and economic freedom has been a major force which has pushed a section of the literate women to a conscious efforts of arousing awareness against the existing social malpractices.

Unfortunately, there has been no published works on this as most of the welfare measures has been totally voluntary which till recently has been confined within the ivory tower of social hierarchy, which limited itself by organising philanthropic activities, more for entertainment than welfare measures. However, simultaneously there have been organisations which have aimed at the problem of women with all conscious efforts. One such organisation is the Arunachal Women's Welfare Association established in October 1979, by a handful of volunteers. Though in almost 15 years they have not been able to spread much, but they are working on women welfare measures at the grass-root level. To give a brief outline of their activities, one cannot overlook the wide aspects covered starting from craft centres, adult education centres, schools for the orphans and women welfare centres to support the needy, economically and morally.

Having their Headquarters at Itanagar, most of the NGOs meet twice a year where a course of action is chalked out. Usually these NGOs visit the interior districts to enable the rural folks the glimpse of development, creating an intricate linkage of conscious efforts to give the women a new dimension.

Recently in 1989, a state level seminar was organised where the women rights issues were taken up. In the NGOs meeting at New Delhi, a group of ladies nominated Arunachal Pradesh in the discussion for country's paper on women's problems to be sent to World Women Conference to be held in Beijing in 1995. Other small organisations, like Oju Women Welfare Centre and Government's Women Welfare Departments are also working in this direction. Thus, it is evident that awareness is picking up fast among the educated section, though they are yet to launch a prominent movement.

Unfortunately, despite all these a major section of the women in Arunachal Pradesh, particularly the rural and also a section of the urban continue to reel under the social drudgeries. To quote Mrs. Jarjum Ete, who is one of the prominent social workers of Arunachal

Pradesh, the social limits still persist creating a condition where women are treated as merely burden of beasts. Practices like bride price still exist in a very prominent manner which literally means bringing the women with a customary right to make her work under compulsion. Marriage by contract, where a contract is made between parents sometime, may be even before the child is born, and later on has to be honoured as per contract, which is often against the girl's wish and leads to social conflicts. The cases of child marriages, and forcible marriage are also found where the girl is even kidnapped sometime with the consent of her parents and is kept under shackles till she conceives. Besides, polygamy is still common. Murder and torture cases are also evident, but are seldom brought to the notice of law and is mostly settled in Kebab-Panchayats, where customary law settles the dispute.

One of such incidents, to quote Mrs. J. Ete, on May 15, 1994 a case had been brought to the Dy. Commissioner of Along where the first wife had poured boiling water over the recently married younger one, interestingly the woman was arrested but even a statement was not taken from her husband. Another case of murder where the wife murdered the husband since she was forced to marry with him under torturous conditions, she was imprisoned. However, there is no doubt that in comparison to past the trend is towards a lower statistics.

But, interestingly, as such cases are reducing drastically, they are found to be practised among a segment of the educated lot more prominently in the city areas than the rural.

This is explained by some of the welfare associations as taking privilege of the customary law which prevails over the law of the country and therefore the so-called elites are using these loopholes of law to practise such taboos. While an educated section of ladies are indifferent so long as they are not affected or are accepting it as a social practice to gain a position of prestige over other in a customary social system.

But the stir has begun and is hitting at the consciousness of a major section of the women force. This is evident from the reaction of the youths who are not only becoming politically conscious, but are taking interest and are aware of the existing loopholes. The trend of abolishing this evil practice among them are definitely one of the most positive signs. Therefore, the meetings and activities, though

restricted within the drawing rooms or office compounds, are bound to bring changes. The linkages with the outside world and rapid influence of the echoes of modernisation are showing its sign in the form of voices aired against the pressing down treatment to the women and is challenged over as the social practices or even as a part of customs. Women, undoubtedly, are the strongest of the social forces. Their role both indoors and outdoors are so intricately linked that a conscious effort striking at their base is bound to bring in a change in the society. Over the ages women have been able gearing their own houses, and thus are much more efficient to accept the changes in an adjustable manner. Their role is and will be instrumental in shaping the social movement towards progress. It is thus just a matter of time and the right gear that will zoom their efforts towards conscious, aware and acceptable social conditions.

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