

Social Movements on a Decline

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Two decades ago it was common experience that public mobilisation in the form of social movements use to be the main sources of the voice for the marginalised groups across the globe. Issues related to welfare, livelihood and rights of the weak in society are often articulated by these movements. Intellectuals, academics, students, activists, artists and leaders of political parties use to play a significant role as their driving forces. These movements use to be so strong that governments were forced to ponder over their concerns. Individuals who worked in such movements have enjoyed a great respect in society. But today all that has become part of history. Public mobilisation is hardly visible today. This does not mean that there are no issues and people are happy on all fronts. By contrast the real poverty is on a rise, violation of rights is continue unabated and livelihood opportunities are sinking. Despite these shocking realities why is there a massive public complacency? Why are there no public mobilisations against them? What happened to the social movements? are some questions that demand a serious discussion at this juncture. An attempt has been made here to find out reasons for such a massive phenomenon.

Social movements as collective efforts (Horton and Hunt) to achieve a common goal was wide spread in all countries led by deprived social groups. Women, Dalits, tribals, and backward castes in India have been actively involved in articulating their concerns through social movements. At different points of time they have mobilised their respective social groups for various purposes. But that cohesion in these communities seem to have been losing ground gradually over a period of time, indicating much deeper a social crisis. MSA Rao's thesis that collective action needs to remain sustained for a long time to get qualified as a social movement, proves to be missing on a fast track among these mobilisations. The organisational framework of a social movements which was considered very essential (Paul Wilinon) is also in question as several organisations have broken into pieces. Differences among members of a social movement over ideological stand points, combined with individual priorities proved to be fatal for the collapse of collective social projects leading to the breakdown of the social movements. It was argued that when a social movement become successful it can be said to have reached its final stage and automatically disappear itself (Wallace and Wallace). But experience shows that even without reaching the minimum levels of goals social movements in India seem to have been suffering an abrupt decline. Generally a Social movement could dissolve when it become an enduring organisation (Horton and Hunt). But in India

they are fading away without becoming enduring organisations. This phenomenon of decline of social movements demands a serious examination to understand as to why it happen.

Social movements have got their severe blow from the early part of 1990s with the onset of globalisation . Priority to given to the NGOs in the globalisation project paved the way for the decline of the social movements across the globe. Since globalisation is characterised by the retreat of the state from welfare it is bound to generate opposition and resistance from the vulnerable masses in different regions. To face this opposition , it is argued that the forces of globalisation deployed NGOs to disintegrate local communities by triggering identity consciousness ,and differences between diverse social groups in a subtle manner. Identity was felt required by the agents of globalisation as it has an inherent character to collapse collective consciousness. It's a fact that, end of identity would be individual which often ignores the significance of social collective. Therefore, once identity consciousness is instilled people could be diverted from the state and its welfare expenditure. There are ample evidences, when different social groups that once fought together in grabbing the state's attention to their issues, are now been completely ignored by the state.

In fact they have succeeded in implementing their project by converting the existing differences between different social groups into rivalries. Once different social groups engage in fighting among themselves , they would focus more on their immediate rival who is her next neighbouring individual or community and lose sight of the mojour enemy i.e the global forces. All the sub-identity clashes in the post-globalised India should be understood in this backdrop. It's a fact that though identity movements have done some good to the hitherto neglected communities now they have been throwing more challenges at them. Though remain under the same umbrella with similar type of suffering no two social groups are capable of sailing together for a common interest . If one community propose something immediately the other group would opposes it regardless of the significance of the proposal in the larger context. The globalised state would show the opposition of the rival group as a reason for not implementing the later's proposal , further widening the gap. Identity is an anti-thesis to the social collective and as such destroys common concerns. The globalised state exactly looks for this phenomenon and tries to sustain it for long.

Another important feature of globalisation is expansion of market and industry beyond the limits of national geographical boundaries .This leads to the exploitation of local material and human resources by the national and multinational business corporations. Often this expansion has met with stiff resistance from the collectives formed by the indigenous communities in several countries. Tribal resistance in the central India, agency areas of Andhrapradesh and Odisha against the mining projects offers best examples to this phenomenon. Since social movements plays crucial role in organising the local communities against mining, thereby destruction of their environment and livelihood sources they are seen as hurdles by the market forces. This necessitates them to breakdown the social movements by any means to push through their projects. Social differences such as religion, caste,

sub-caste and ethnicity being sensitive and emotional comes handy in splitting their solidarities. Today the gap between different religious communities, caste groups and ethnic groups is unprecedented and hit the social movements hard.

The heightened individuality, another offshoot of the identity politics has also hit the social cohesion hard. The globalisation project has brought the individual to the centre in such a big way that the individual is made to completely forget the community that had produced him. The increasing aspirations on one hand and the scarce resources on the other has made the individual so desperate for wealth that he gets ready to go to any extent for it let alone the social relationships and concerns. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's theory of 'liquid modernity' explains this crisis in a perfect manner where he argues that all the bonds- 'family, friendship, collective political projects collapse or erode' and become fluid to prepare a conducive environment for power and capital by exploiting the fragmentation and disarray of the forces opposing them.

The NGOs offering a middle path for solutions to different problems, deviating from that of a confrontation has also attracted the public and thus breached the social movements. Employment opportunities and handsome salaries offered by them to the local articulate and educated persons has also depleted the organic intellectuals from their roots who were hitherto organising the masses on deferent issues. In the early years of the 21 century, particularly around 2005 the NGOs have become the destination for unemployed youth. During that period employment in NGOs was considered to be so crazy that aspirants before approaching NGOs use to apply for passport feeling ensured of a foreign visit as part of their duty. Thus the employment by the NGOs has lead to a co-option of organic intellectuals and local leaders which further collapsed the local social leadership.

The increasing role of finance in electoral politics has also led to the collapse of social and community bondage. The image of the social and community leadership at different levels was seen as a vote catching force which raised their demand in the eyes of political leaders. Therefore, they were co-opted either by offering petty positions or a purse. There are several instances where social and community leaders have joined some or other political party and thus lost credibility and public confidence. Paradoxically, experience of the people with their earlier co-opted community leaders made them so optimistic that they too are trying to follow them and make money apart from suspecting everyone as an opportunist. Social movements were successful to an extent during the pre-globalised period as there was very little role for money in the electoral politics. The leadership of those days use to sacrifice for the community. But today the new orientation that money is everything and nothing is immoral or un-ethical in the process of accumulating it has come to stay. Development of this mind set attitude in public has given a big jolt to the social movements.

,Thus, marketization, Identity politics, increasing role of finance in politics, heightened individualism got a fresh and powerful lease of life by the globalisation killed the social movements.

It is interesting to observe that the identity politics which has contributed for the strengthening of the social movements has finally come to bury them out. The ultimate limitation of the identity politics i.e. uncontrolled individual is on its highest pedestal today than ever before.

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