UNIT 2: THEORIES OF SOCIAL MOVEMENT

UNIT STRUCTURE

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2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to -

- Know various theories of social movement such as Relative Deprivation, Structural-Functional, and Resource Mobilisation Theory.
- Know different approaches to the study of social movements.
- Know about the sociological approaches to the study of social movements and social transformations.

2.2 INTRODUCTION

Social Movement is a collective action by the people which is directed towards changing of norms, values, and social relationships. Social movements are purposeful, organized groups striving to work towards a common goal. There have been several theoretical and empirical writings on social movements and collective action within the last decade. These writings have prompted various debates, and developed a new school of thought. Moreover, important research on social movements is being conducted in various disciplines including Sociology, Political Science,

History, Economics and communication. Theories tried to explain the structural conditions and motivational force that help to raise a movement. The purpose of this unit is to provide insights into theories such as structural, functional, resource mobilisation and also gives an understanding of the concept of relative deprivation. This unit looks at some of the more prominent theories that have been put forward in an attempt to understand why social movements are born (and grow). It also demonstrates how some of these theories can be used to explain some prominent social movements. For example, the deprivation theory was used to explain the birth of the civil rights and the feminist movements in the U.S. The resource mobilization theory was used to show how modern electronic technologies (like the Internet and cell phones) have helped in the mobilization of human resources in the anti-WTO demonstrations that were organized in various cities around the world.

2.3 RELATIVE DEPRIVATION THEORY

Relative deprivation is a feeling that one is not receiving a fair share of available resources. Thus when any individual or group feels worst off as compared to others then social conflict arises. This theory has been developed in two different lines, social conflict and social mobility. This theory was first used by R. Merton with the concept of reference group theory. He applied this to understand the concept of social mobility. He refers to a situation where the persons perceive that they have less than they deserve, that they are deprived compared to their reference groups. Thus relative deprivation is made the basis of the study of social mobility as occurring through emulation and positive reference group behaviour. Marx developed the concept of relative deprivation emphasizing on the element of conflict. He recognized that dissatisfaction with the status quo was not determined by absolute condition but by the relative condition. Ted Gurr defined relative deprivation as a gap between expectations and perceived capabilities involving three sets of values: economic conditions, political power and social status. [1] In his book “Why Men Rebel” Ted Gurr explores why people

engage in political violence and how do they respond it. According to him, frustration not only leads to violence but also leads to aggressive behaviour when they feel relatively deprived.

This theory emphasized the role of psychological factors such as resentment and encourages social conflict and subsequent social movements. It is not a simple experience that if someone does not have what others have, and that people want what everyone else has. But it is related to the idea of expectation i.e. legitimate expectation, a right to have it or they deserve what they demand. This means when individuals are unable to achieve goals through conventional means a feeling of relative deprivation arises. Thus if the expectation is not achieved they experience discontent and frustration. There are three types of deprivation, these are as follows:

a) Decremental Deprivation- It occurs when the value capabilities of a given population decline due to one or several national disasters.

b) Aspirational Deprivation- It occurs when value capabilities of a group remain constant while the value expectation increases.

c) Progressive Deprivation- It occurs when value capabilities stabilize or decline after a period when value capabilities and value expectation have increased together.

According to proponents of the deprivation theory, some social movements are born when certain people or certain groups of people in a society feel that they are deprived of a specific good, service, or resource.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. Define Relative Deprivation.

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Q2. What are two important elements of Relative Deprivation Theory?

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Q3. Who used Relative Deprivation for the first time?

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Q4. Who emphasizes on social conflict in developing relative deprivation?

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Q5. What is meant by legitimate expectation?

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2.4 STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONAL THEORY

The structural approach to social movements brings to the forefront of analysis the institutionalized injustices and inequalities over which contested politics are fought. According to this approach, the formation of collective action means organizing activity and efforts for challenging the status quo-the existing power structure and its relation. This approach links social movements with the rising aspirations of the people. This gap between expectation of the people and the performance of the system leads to mass movement creating political instability and political disorder.

Smelser's analysis of the genesis of social movement is in the structural-functional framework. He considered strain as the impairment of relations among parts of a system leading to malfunctioning of the system. He has explored six major structural conditions or factors responsible for a social movement. Firstly the structural conduciveness that refers to a situation when a society is found to have serious and prolong structural problems by which some people continue to live with low living standards or confront political repressions. Secondly, the strains that caused by social structures or the structural strains can spur social movement. For instance exclusion of tribal people, inequity, ethnic marginalization etc are found to be crucial factors behind the social movements. Thirdly deprivation is not enough to spur social movements but an explanation of how deprivation occurs is too important. Fourthly long existed discontentment or a series of

such related events may cause social movements. Fifthly the mobilization for action as a factor becomes crucial in explaining the formation of a social movement. Finally, social movement occurs due to a lack of social control. It depends on the type of government response such as officials, police and military.

The women's movement in India can be explained by the structural strain approach. The traditional stereotype images for women perpetuate domination by their fathers during a young age, by their husbands after marriage and by their sons during widowhood, thus causing strain. The job market discriminates them by proving them unequal wages, choice of employment etc. therefore the rise of women's movement can be explained with the reference to these structural strains and inequalities.[2]



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:

Q6. Who propounded strain theory?

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Q7. What are structural strains that lead to social movement?

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2.5 RESOURCE MOBILISATION THEORY

This approach is based on rational choice theory. It begins by arguing that motivations of a person are influenced by goals and whenever such goals are not met due to given constraints and available choices, people make a rational choice regarding what is the best for them at a particular moment. In other words, rational individuals choose alternatives to get maximum satisfaction and in the process, they use their emotion or impulse to join a movement. This theory, therefore, explains social movement as a temporary phenomenon. This theory is called 'resource mobilisation' because people depend on available resources to launch a social movement

and the success of the movement depends on the strength of these resources.

The Resource Mobilisation theory reveals that no social movements are likely to succeed or even set off grounds without substantial resources. The well defined collective action i.e. structural deprivation and strains, conflicts and contestation alone may not cause social movement. But it is derived by effective and efficient use of resources such as human, social, physical, financial are essential for social movements. Both internal and external resources mobilisation contribute to the formation of a social movement. The internet, particularly the use of social media, is used as vital resources for mobilizing opinions in the contemporary world.

The resource mobilization theory invokes the importance of the availability of suitable resources in the birth of a social movement. This theory thus says that when some individuals in a society have certain grievances, they may be able to mobilize necessary resources to do something to alleviate those grievances. The term "resources" in this context refer to things like money, labour, social status, knowledge, support of the media and political elites. One of the great advantages of this theory is that it offers a convincing explanation as to why in some situations some grievances may give birth to a successful social movement, whereas in other situations the same types of grievances may not give birth to anything similar. One of the major criticisms of this theory is that it has an extremely strong "materialist" orientation in that it gives primacy to the presence of appropriate resources (especially money) in explaining the birth of social movements. There are social movements that have been born even when resources (especially financial ones) were scarce.[3]



2.6 LET US SUM UP

- Theories try to explain the structural conditions and motivational force that help to rise to a movement. Deprivation is a feeling that one is not receiving a fair share of available resources. Thus when

any individual or group feels worst off as compared to others then social conflict arises.

- Relative Deprivation Theory has been developed in two different lines, social conflict and social mobility. This theory was first used by R. Merton with the concept of reference group theory. He applied this to understand the concept of social mobility.
- The structural approach to social movements brings to the forefront of analysis the institutionalized injustices and inequalities over which contested politics are fought. According to this approach, the formation of collective action means organizing activity and efforts for challenging the status quo-the existing power structure and its relation. This approach links social movements with the rising aspirations of the people.
- The resource mobilisation theory reveals that no social movement is likely to succeed or even set off grounds without substantial resources. Unlike deprivation theory the resource mobilisation approach points out that though deprivation is indispensable it requires the mobilisation of resources to cause social movements.
- Both internal and external resource mobilisation contribute to the formation of a social movement. If the insiders lack adequate resources, the outsiders may instil them. For instance, black poor people may be united by the White activists or a higher caste may help mobilize lower caste movement or men can come to the help of women leaders
- The internet, including social media, are used as vital resources for mobilizing opinions in contemporary times.
- N.Smelser has explored six major conditions/factors responsible for a social movement - structural conduciveness, the fact that no society is indeed free from strains and also no all strains can lead to collective actions, the idea that deprivation , though not enough to spur social movement but its explanation is also crucial, the precipitating factors like long existed discontentment or a series of such related events, the mobilization for action as a factor becomes

crucial in explaining the formation of a social movement, the lack of social control.

- Gurr has also tried to explain why individuals, group and communities join social movements. He discussed three possible patterns of relative deprivations: Decremental deprivation, inspirational deprivation and progressive deprivation.
- In particular, the social movements are shaped by broad structural forces that affect distributions of economic resources and political power and those institutions that encourage, channel and repress social activism.
- The challengers, authorities and other actors shape the evolving contexts for the protest. In the West, for example, we see a history of social movements organized around labour, gender, and race. Each of these categories represents not only a group of people wishing to improve their lot but also a systemic social division in which one group is allocated less than another.





2.7 FURTHER READING

1. Buechler, Steven. 2011. Understanding Social Movements: Theories from the Classical Era to the present. Paradigm Publishers.

2.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Relative deprivation is defined as a gap between expectations and perceived capabilities involving three sets of values: economic conditions, political power and social status. This emphasized the role of psychological factors such as resentment and encourages social conflict and subsequent social movements.

Ans to Q No 2: The two important elements of Relative Deprivation theory are social conflict and social mobility.

Ans to Q No 3: The term Relative Deprivation was used by R. Merton with the concept of reference group theory. He applied this to understand the concept of social mobility.

Ans to Q No 4: Karl Marx emphasized on social conflict in developing relative deprivation.

Ans to Q No 5: Legitimate expectation, a right to have it or they deserve what they demand. This means when individuals are unable to achieve goals through conventional means a feeling of relative deprivation arises.

Ans to Q No 6: N. Smelser had propounded Strain theory of Social Movement.

Ans to Q No 7: The structural conduciveness, exclusion, inequity, ethnic marginalization, deprivation, long existed discontentment or a series of such related events, mobilization and lack of social control are the structural strains that leads to Social Movement.



2.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question within 150 words)

Q1. What is the most important element of Resource Mobilizing theory?

Q2. What type of resources drives social movement?

Long Questions (Answer each question within 300-500 words)

Q1. Discuss the Structural-Functional approach of Social Movement.

Q2. Explain the major factors conducive for social movement as explored by N. Smelser.