

Sociology of Social Movements

Meaning, Features, Causes, Types, Theories and Perspectives
Indian Scenario &
Peasant Movements in India

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Introduction:

Contemporary society has been witnessing collective mobilizations of

- ▶ people's action groups; protest movements;
- ▶ resistance concerned with land rights,
- ▶ environmentalism,
- ▶ women's rights,
- ▶ peace initiatives,
- ▶ response to consumerism,
- ▶ lifestyle choices and many other issues.

Against this backdrop, there have been many studies on social movements during the last five decades by social scientists in general and sociologists in particular. Why and how do social movements emerge? How are they analyzed? What are the sociological approaches to the study of social movements?

Sociology principally aims at studying the structure of social systems and its institutions, the perennial processes of change triggered by a combination of endogenous factors and external conditions, and the resulting outcomes, intended or unintended. One of the major focuses has been on the study of social movement. Historically, social movements as a field of study within Sociology and the social sciences are a late entrant.

Concept:

- ▶ Conceptualizing the term 'social movement' has been a difficult task. Protests, collective actions, agitations, resistances and rebellions, collective mobilizations of all varieties have generally been described as social movements.
- ▶ There is no single definition of social movement nor a single method for studying them nor any consensus on particular types of questions that need to be addressed.
- ▶ Heberle (1951) regards the belief system that underlies social mobilizations as an expression of collective will of the participants. It is the conscious volition of individuals acting collectively that brings about the embodiment of ideologies in social movements.

- ▶ Wilkinson (1971) provides a working concept, which could be adequately deployed and related to empirical phenomena by the combined, and often collaborative, efforts of historians, political scientists, sociologists, social anthropologists and psychologists.
- ▶ Social movement is a deliberate collective endeavor to promote change by any means, not excluding violence, illegality and revolution or withdrawal into 'utopian' community ... and it must evince a minimal degree of organization though this may range from a loose, informal or partial level of organization to the highly institutionalized and bureaucratic movement and the corporate group. (Wilkinson 1971: 27)
- ▶ Wilkinson's definition of movement spells out a collective action through legal means very much within the boundary of institutions as well as violent extra-institutional collective action.
- ▶ Wilkinson (1971: 27) argues that 'social movements have a commitment towards bringing about change and the raison d'être of its organization have been founded upon the conscious volition, normative commitment to the movement aims or beliefs and active participation of followers or members...' .

- ▶ Sydney Tarrow (1998) argues how the connections between Political Science, Economics and Sociology can help to develop an inter-disciplinary approach to the study of social movements. He combines some of the insights of Economics with the macro-structural focus of Political Science to propose a theory that accounts for the cyclical nature of social protest activity.

There is a variety of different methodological, theoretical and substantive approaches to the study of social movements due to the broad and inclusive nature of Sociology. As a social science, Sociology is noteworthy because it has influence of various disciplines in order to understand the relationship between the individual and society.

Categorization:

Sociologists and Anthropologists who have studied movements in their own or other societies have labelled them as

- 'political/social',
- 'messianic',
- 'nativist'
- 'revitalisation'

The second defining criteria of social movements refers to the 'means' employed to attain their goals.

This is followed by the criteria of spatial and societal scope of the movement.

Finally, there is the substantive aspect of content (whether religious or secular, etc.).

Classification of Social Movements

- Herbert Bulmmer (1969) classifies movements into three major categories, namely general social movements, specific social movements and expressive social movements.

General social movements gives general direction towards which they move in a slow, yet a persisting fashion, unorganised, neither established leadership nor recognised movement.	Specific social movements has clear-cut and well-defined objectives, which seeks to reach the goal. It also develops a recognised and accepted leadership and definite goals, characterised by collective consciousness, for example, various reform and revolutionary movements.	expressive social movements do not seek to alter the institutions or its objective character. Various religious and fashion movements come under this category.
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- Ralph H. Turner and Lewis M. Killian (1957) have also classified movements into three types-value oriented, power oriented and participation oriented.

value oriented gain support primarily from the conviction for social change	power oriented are directed towards contestation of power and status and their accumulation	participation oriented seeks membership and gratification mainly through self-expression.
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- David Aberle (1966) in his study of America's Navaho Indians categorizes movements as:
 - transformative,
 - reformative,
 - redemptive and
 - alternative movements.
- Neil J. Smelser (1962) attempts to integrate his typology of social movements with the general theory of collective action from a Parsonian perspective. The primacy of value orientation is followed by the normative, the goal attainment and adaptive functions of collective behaviour. Correspondingly, he puts emphasis on the growth and spread of generalised belief, the structural strains produced within the social system and the adaptive mechanisms by which these are met and resolved or not resolved.

Features

- Movements and collective actions are characterized by some continuity and minimum degree of organization (Heberle 1951; Turner and Killian 1957; Wilkinson 1971; Wilson 1973).
- With the sustained action and some level of organizational structure, the collectivities involved in social movements usually adopt non-institutionalized means to achieve the goal (Smelser 1962; Wilson 1973).
- Consistent with researches on social movements, studies on contemporary social movements have focused on the organizational aspect, collective action and consequent changes in the social structure.

Approaches to the study of Social Movements:

- T. K. Oommen (2010) describes three approaches to the study of social movements: historical, psychological and sociological.

Historical focuses on the career of movements and characteristics of participants and their motivation	Psychological perceives movements as expressions of needs and discontents of participants	Sociological presupposes a theory of society within which collective actions take place.
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He points out the limitations of the structural-functional paradigm in the analysis of social movements as it stresses on order and integration rather than on conflict and change.

... Oommen

Oommen has traced the historical evolution of theories of social movements from classical thinkers: Durkheim, Weber and Marx. Though, they did not propound specifically any theory of social movements, their sociology is premised on collective actions in the analysis of society.

Durkheim Durkheim in his <i>The Division of Labour in Society</i> (1893) and later in <i>Elementary Forms of Religious Life</i> (1912) postulated a theory of collective action and the kind of solidarity that produced and approved forms of collective action.	Weber Weber had conceptualised the theory of social change with the notion of 'reutilizations of charisma' where two opposing forces of disruption are the authority of rationality and the power of charisma.	Marxian notion describes social change as more systematic. Marx took into account the collective actions of antagonistic classes (Oommen 2010: 2-6).
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► A collective mobilisation is called a social movement when it develops an organisational structure, rules, established leadership and a division of labour. The criteria employed by various authors to define a movement are goals, means, scope and content

Oommen has used two criteria for the classification of social movements:

- **types of collectivities:** (biological, primordial and civil)
- **nature of goals** (symbolic and instrumental) to sketch out the phase-wise development of social movements in twentieth-century India (Oommen 2010: 16-17).

[These are the colonial phase (1900-47), the nation-building phase (1947-89) and the present phase (1990 to the present) of a globalising India.]

Oommen distinguishes between three ideal-typical movements: ideological, organisational and charismatic. Irrespective of which type of movement component emerges first, the elements of other two will have to emerge subsequently, if it has to become a social movement (Ibid: 34-38).

Partha N Mukherji
Partha N. Mukherji deals with a number of fundamental issues. Are all collective/social mobilisations to be regarded as social movements?

- To qualify as a social movement of one kind or another, **structurally, the three essentials are: social conflict, social/collective mobilisation and social change in their interrelation.** Singly, none of these constitute social movement.
- **Collective mobilisation against AIDS, or for Pulse Polio, or engaging in disaster management or community development are laudable social activities, but they are not social movements.** They may be better designated as campaigns for public good.
- **Conflict, structure and change constitute the core of the theoretical orientation for the study of social movements.** The **presence of an ideology**, the need for an organisational base and leadership are necessary conditions that accompany the core conditionalities (Mukherji 2010: 126-27).

...Mukherji

<p>Quasi-social</p> <p>Social mobilisations seeking changes within the system are quasi-social movements; Quasi-social movements include those that bargain for better resources and facilities, and redressal of grievances.</p>	<p>alterative</p> <p>Those that seek to alter the system (by eliminating an existing structure or adding a new one) are alterative social movements; An agrarian movement leading to the elimination of bonded labour is an instance of an alterative social movement.</p>	<p>transformative</p> <p>Those that reject existing structure(s) and replace them with alternative one(s) could be transformative or revolutionary movements eg., The replacement of state ownership of property by private ownership</p>
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► **Mukherji** rounds off his theoretical orientation by a *domainal* categorisation of the social system at the macro-societal level. He conceives of a social system comprising of **five analytically distinct domains** of asymmetrical social relationships, namely, **discrimination, exploitation, oppression, gender discrimination and eco-environmental asymmetry**. He suggests these set of five asymmetries find favour in the social science literature. He illustrates the use of this theoretical framework by analysing the Maoist movement (Mukherji 2010: 134-40).

M. S. A Rao

M. S. A Rao (1978) was the first sociologist who has attempted to put together the studies of social movements by various scholars in his two edited volumes.

- Rao argues that sociologists and social anthropologists have been preoccupied with the concept of social structure at various levels of abstraction. Generally, social movements deal with a range of social phenomena that include all that can be observed while studying the process.
- If we consider a social movement to be an organized effort on the part of a collectivity, involving social mobilization based on an ideology for bringing about changes (either partial or total) in the social system, then we have to view social process as consisting of interrelated activities, interactions and events guided by an ideology directed towards social and cultural changes.
- The character of social movements as an instrument of social change is quite different from an imitative or emulative process of mobility and change. While the latter centres on agreement, the former is focused on protest of one kind or the other. Following from this, the latter emphasizes on contradiction and conflict.

... Rao

- The conceptual issues deal with social movement's definition (typification) and implications for social order.
- Rao (1979) identifies the conceptual issues as classification, genesis, ideology and identity, organization and leadership, internal dynamics, routinization and social consequences.
- Collective mobilization, ideology and orientation to change are important. According to Rao, explanation relating to social movements lies in the theory of relative deprivation and reference group behavior. He questions the validity of strain theory or revitalization theory as providing adequate explanation of social movements. The organization comprises aspects of recruitment, commitment and leadership.
- **As for Rao, a movement may bring about social change either in the form of reform, transformation or revolution.** Corresponding to these three outcomes one can classify social movements as **reformative, transformative or revolutionary**.

D N Dhanagare

- D. N. Dhanagare (2007) is of the view that historical method has a comparatively greater appeal among sociologists. Reviewing contributions of various sociologists on social movements, many movement studies including those of A. R. Desai, I. P. Desai, M. S. A Rao, Partha Nath Mukherji, T. K. Oommen, Rajendra Singh, Hira Singh, Ram Chandra Guha, Puspendra Surana and himself have employed this approach. All of them have used history rigorously to arrive at broader levels of explanation, generalisation and theoretical abstraction. However, conventional movements attracted more attention of the scholars than some of new social movements (Dhanagare and John 1988).
- **Dhanagare's contribution to the theoretical discourse on peasant movement in Indian Sociology is worth mentioning.** He has highlighted ideology, leadership, nature of protest and grass-roots participation in the various peasant movements in India. Based on the study of Tebhaga, Telengana, Moplah, Bardoli, Oudh Kishan Mahasabha and left-wing peasant movements, Dhanagare offers a comparative analysis of Indian peasantry and its class character.
- Professor Dhanagare examines Bardoli satyagraha and other agrarian agitations in the context of National Congress politics in Oudh. He is highly critical of Gandhian ideology and strategy in the movement. In terms of social and economic consequences professor Dhanagare argues that Gandhian activity in Bardoli satyagraha did not bring about any changes in the structure of economic relations between Patidar landowners, other peasant proprietors and the poor peasantry.

...Dhanagare

- ▶ **Tebhaga movement (1946) and Telangana movement (1946)** were organized on the basis of Marxian ideology. Tebhaga movement was spearheaded by CPI controlled Kisan Sabha in Bengal while the base of the movement consisted of the sharecroppers (bargadars), leadership came from the middle peasants (jotedars). After an initial success, the movement faded out. Here again there were serious limitations for the class formation and class struggle.
- ▶ **The Telangana movement in 1946** was also led by the communists. The social basis of the movement was mixed. The well-to-do peasants who were the leading Communists rallied the support of the middle peasants, tenants, sharecroppers and landless labourers against the big absentee landlords, jagirdars and deshmukhs. The interests of such a mixed category were not only divergent but conflicting, the 'class' alliance was weak and the poor peasants started seizing the land of the rich peasants who spearheaded the movement. The latter got alarmed and deserted the alliance. This split was reflected in the ranks of the Telangana communist leadership and ultimately the resurrection was withdrawn.
- ▶ Professor Dhanagare characterizes the **1921 Moplah Rebellion** as an expression of long standing agrarian discontent, which was intensified by the religious and ethnic identity of the Moplahs. However, the evidence that professor Dhanagare himself presents and the evidence from Mopilla ballads and other evidence produced by Ronald e. miller (Mapilla muslims of Kerala, Delhi: orient Longan, 1976:118-153) indicate that it was more a communal (Hindu-Muslim) outbreak in which the Muslim elite made use of the frustrations of muslim Verumpattamdar tenants and Laboureres against the Hindus in general and Hind Kanamdar and jennis in particular.

Yogendra Singh

- ▶ **Yogendra Singh (1986)** argues that most studies on social movements have not only made substantive contributions by providing information on specific movements, their structure and process, but have also tried to clarify conceptual problems relating to classification and raised questions on causality and validity. The two key concepts, which were introduced in sociological analysis of movement studies, are those of 'historicity' and the 'dialectic of social processes'.

Rajendra Singh

- ▶ **Rajendra Singh (2001)** broadly divides the theoretical tradition of movement studies into (a) classical, (b) neo-classical and (c) 'new' social movements. The classical tradition includes studies mostly related to collective behavior of crowds, riots and rebel groups especially studied by Western social psychologists and historians. The neo-classical tradition refers to the tradition of 'old' social movement studies mainly after 1950s dominated primarily by Marxists and functionalists.
 - ▶ **Rajendra Singh (2001)** broadly divides the theoretical tradition of movement studies into (a) classical, (b) neo-classical and (c) 'new' social movements.
- The **classical tradition** includes studies mostly related to collective behavior of crowds, riots and rebel groups especially studied by Western social psychologists and historians.
- The **neo-classical tradition** refers to the tradition of 'old' social movement studies mainly after 1950s dominated primarily by Marxists and functionalists.
- European and American scholars propounded the 'new' social movement theory, popularly known as NSM.

New Social Movement

- ▶ **The socialist working-class movement occupied the social movement space until the arrival of 'new social movements' in the late 1960s and the early 1970s.** Heberle (1968) was one of the earliest to forcefully argue that social movement studies needed to be expanded beyond the working-class movements to include others.
- Singh summarizes some of the **characteristics of the NSMs:**
- ▶ They **raise the issue of the 'self-defence'** of the community against the state and the consciousness of civil society, which are new phenomena of contemporary postmodern world.
 - ▶ NSMs **do not subscribe to the Marxist paradigm** of explaining conflicts and contradictions in terms of 'class' and class conflict.
 - ▶ NSMs generally **evolve through grass-roots politics.** Grass-roots actions often initiate micro-movements of small groups, targeting localized issues with a limited institutional base. They write their own scripts like a street theatre. They focus much more on social domain of civil society rather than the economy or state. Further, the goal of NSMs is to reorganise state, society and economy and to create a public space in which democratic discourse on autonomy and freedom of the individual and collectivities, their identities and orientations could be analyzed.
 - ▶ NSMs are **essentially plural in structure and generally global and trans-human in character,** which include protest against nuclear war, advocacy for environment, peace, civil liberty, identity, freedom and personal dignity (Singh 2001).

...NSM

- ▶ **Western perspective particularly on new social movement (NSMs), analysis of two broad theoretical perspectives known as Resource Mobilisation Theory (RMT) and Identity-Oriented Theory (IOT) of American and European traditions.**

IOT has its emphasis on the cultural dimensions of contemporary social movements and the structural conditions, which explain their emergence.

IOT defines contemporary social movements as new, but there is considerable debate about whether and in what ways they are significantly different from other social movements

RMT has its focus on organisations and the notion of rational action. There are limitations of these theories specifically on the difficulties they encounter when dealing with the people's movements

New social movements arise not from relations of production and distribution but from within the sphere of reproduction of the life world, hence the issues of resource distribution are said to be irrelevant to them. Their action primarily concerns civil society rather than the state.

...NSM

- ▶ **Touraine's (1985) notion of historicity is analogous to Gramsci's hegemony,** both being concerned with culture and definitions of social reality, and the way social conflict has the potential to transform dominant definitions of social realities that are reproduced through cultural forms. These social forces are social movements, and their struggles are about culture and meaning.
- ▶ **NSM theorists distinguish social movements from political movements.** Political movements are concerned with the state and state power, whilst new social movements are concerned with the cultural codes, specifically, the production of symbolic goods of information and images, of culture itself. Thus, 'social movements', in a strict sense, represent conflicting efforts to control cultural patterns in a given societal type'. New social movements, therefore, are located in the civil society and are involved in bringing about cultural change.
- ▶ **The structural location of new social movements** is reflected in their social base which is no longer the working class but the 'new class' or the new middle class inclusive of the old rural classes (Melucci 1980). The new middle class is drawn from the service professions and the public sector and their activism is explained by their relatively high levels of education and their access to information (Offe 1985: 817-68).
- ▶ **Eyerman and Jamison (1991) argue that new social movements present a fundamental challenge to the established routine of 'doing politics'** ...redefining situations, opening up new conceptual spaces and framing new issues in political terms.
- ▶ Same position is also adopted by **Claus Offe**, who says that the **new social movements represent a new paradigm of politics, which has the potential of transforming the political order.** [These new social movements occur at a distinct stage in societal development, involve new actors equipped with different orientations and identities and aim at achieving quite different ends than the old movements.]

...NSM

- ▶ Some scholars (Akerkar 1995; Baviskar 1995; Dwivedi 2006; Guha and Gadgil 1989; Kothari 1984; Omvedt 1984; Sahu 2004; Seth 1983; Sethi 1993), including those working on feminist, environmental and Dalit movement studies, have attempted to study new social movement in India from NSM perspective.
- ▶ The new social movements are predominantly plural and their expressions range from anti-racism, anti-nuclearism, disarmament, feminism, environmentalism, regionalism and ethnicity, civil libertarianism to issues of personal autonomy, freedom and peace.
- ▶ According to Dhanagare (1983), conventional movements attracted more attention of the scholars than some of new social movements.
- ▶ In India, ecology and environmental movements have received greater attention from social scientists and activists. The contemporary environmental movements with regard to the issues of dams, human displacement and resettlement effectively articulate ecological concerns.
- ▶ Similarly women's movements are IOMs seeking equality and social justice in patriarchal societies. Indian women have been making their presence felt as an important factor in various protest movements in India.
- ▶ Balgovind Baboo (1991) articulates the reconstruction of life by the custees of the Hirakud dam of Orissa and traces the genesis of the project, the processes involved in its construction, displacement of local population and rehabilitation of local people and their resistance to the project.

...NSM

- ▶ Inquiring tribal conflicts over development in Narmada valley, Baviskar (1995) examines the experience of Bhilala tribe in opposing the construction of the dam that threatens to displace from their homeland.
- ▶ Patel and others give a descriptive account of economy, social structure, people's agitation and rehabilitation program of National Missile Testing Project in Baliapal, Orissa (Patel 1989; PUOR 1988)
- ▶ D. R. Sahu (2004) analyses the genesis, processes and consequences of one of the successful protests against the proposed National Missile Testing Range in Baliapal of Orissa during 1980s. The cash-crop economy in general and betel vine economy in particular facilitated the crystallization of collective action and the process of mobilization articulated the ideology of home and hearth, that is, *Bheeta Mati*.
- ▶ Ranjit Dwivedi (2006) analyses the policy debate and collective action in opposition to, and in support of, the Sardar Sarovar Dam Project. Based on a 'project cycle model', the study focuses on design, appraisal, construction, evaluations, reviews, impact and alternatives on an empirical basis.

Social Movement Organisation

- ▶ There are **two types of social movement organisation: professional and classical**; both of these need resources in order to achieve their goals. Resource takes the form of labour, money, premises, transport and legitimacy. Professional social movement organisations appeal for resources from supporters and sympathizers who may not themselves benefit directly from the success of movements. They are known as *conscience adherents*. Classical social movement organisations rely for resources on *beneficiary adherents*, who support the movement's goals in the expectation that they will benefit from its success.
- ▶ Tarrow (1994) defines social movements as 'collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities'. Collective action is not triggered by an increase in the availability of resources but changes in the political opportunity structure.

Major Empirical Contributions: There have been many studies in social movements in India by social scientists in general and sociologists in particular during the last six decades.

- ▶ A. R. Desai (1954) was the first sociologist who contributed to the study of social movements from the Marxian perspective.
- ▶ Stephen Fuchs has studied messianic tribal movements during 1960s.
- ▶ During the 1970s, empirical studies of agrarian, tribal, revolutionary and religious movements were initiated by Indian sociologists, especially Partha Nath Mukherjee, T. K. Oommen, D. N. Dhanagare, M. S. A. Rao and Rajendra Singh.
- ▶ Partha Nath Mukherji's (1987): comparative study of famous Naxalbari peasant movement and Sarvodaya Movement of Bihar, reveals collective mobilisation as an important attribute of social movement. He argues that Naxalism or the Mao-inspired social movements for structural-transformative-revolutionary changes that have taken place almost exclusively in remote, backward, mostly tribal, less-communicable areas of the country are the very regions where the responsible role of the democratic state has least penetrated, leaving feudal enclaves to persist and prosper outside the ambit of governance of the state.

- ▶ T. K. Oommen in 1970s studied *Bhoodan-gramdhan* (land gift) movement in Rajasthan, which was based on the Gandhian Philosophy of *Sarvodaya* (upliftment of all), led by the charismatic leader Vinoba Bhave. Oommen examines Weber's theory of social change which invokes charisma as the force that triggered the change. His argument is that the attributes of charisma are not given forever; they are contextually determined. T. K. Oommen has studied the nature and dynamics of the agrarian movement in Kerala during the twentieth century. His study focuses on understanding peasant struggles in Malabar as well as in Travancore- Cochin princely states that together formed the state of Kerala.
- ▶ M. S. A. Rao (1978) has studied two backward-class movements such as Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) movement in Kerala and Yadava movement in north India in a comparative perspective. He spelled out their ideologies, organisations, leadership and their internal dynamics.
- ▶ Dhanagare's contribution to the theoretical discourse on peasant movement in Indian Sociology is worth mentioning. He has highlighted ideology, leadership, nature of protest and grass-roots participation in the various peasant movements in India. Based on the study of Tebhaga, Telengana, Moplah, Bardoli, Oudh Kishan Mahasabha and left-wing peasant movements, Dhanagare offers a comparative analysis of Indian peasantry and its class character.
- ▶ Kathleen Gough (1979), in her study of peasant movements in south India, classifies peasant movements similar to those of Dhanagare. They are restorative, religious, terrorist, mass insurrectionist movements and social banditry.

- ▶ Rajendra Singh (1988) examines the relationship between power structures, cultural and symbolic systems and peasant revolts in Basti, a district in eastern Uttar Pradesh, from a historical perspective and which is known as 'land-grab movement' (*Nejebal*). His focus is both on contribution and changes in the structure of domination as well as on the emergent counter- ideologies in the process.
- ▶ Both Fuchs and Oommen introduced the role of values and ideologies as pre-eminent elements in the triggering process of social movements.
- ▶ M. S. Gore (1989) discussed the ideology, leadership and nature of protest during two phases of non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra. His main focus was on the interface between social structure and process of social movement.
- ▶ K. L. Sharma (1985) in his study of peasant movements of Rajasthan has used structural-historical perspective. Sharma argues that peasant movements were carried out largely by various organisations like Marwar Hitkari Sabha and Lok Parishad, different 'Praja Manadals', Rajputana Madhya Bharat Sabha, Sewa Sanghs that were engaged in welfare activities simultaneously with the task of political awakening of the peasant masses.

- ▶ **Dipankar Gupta (1982)** studied a regional political-cultural movement, the *Shiv Sena in Mumbai* with the help of a structuralist-Marxist approach. He stresses the role of the mode of production, class structure and class contradiction in explaining social movements.
- ▶ **Gail Omvedt (1976)** postulates a strategy of class struggle in India through the roots of caste mobilisations. The subaltern approach in history explains social movement with the help of structuralism and (semiology), which is known as dialectical-historical perspective.
- ▶ **Yogendra Singh (1986)** argues that most of the studies focus on the impact of changes in the economic, political, social structure and on the segment of castes and communities and social categories which engender a consciousness of identity that is projected into various channels of mobilisation and using new symbols, values, profiles and processes of rationalization

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