
UNIT 12 PEACE MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

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12.1 INTRODUCTION

Peace movements constitute an important component of the subject of peace studies as they seek to spread the message of peace and non-violence far and wide, and deeper in minds of the masses in order to make peace and sustainable development viable policy options for governments. The veracity of peace movements springs from the fact that newer advancements in scientific and technological innovations are providing tools in the hands of man to not only tamper with the regular cycle of nature but also manufacture unconventional weapons of mass destruction. The net result of all such activities would be no less than a perpetual threat to peace in society. Hence, peace movements are conceptualised and operationalised in almost all parts of the world to make people aware of the threats emanating from the instruments of destruction in possession of certain people. In other words, these movements seek to build a strong public opinion against the moves and activities having potential of disturbing peace in short or long term. Such public opinion, in turn, is supposed to persuade and in certain cases compel the governments to abandon the peace-disturbing moves and activities in order to establish peace on long term and sustainable basis.

In the countries like India where threats to peace and order in society emanate not only from the obvious portents such as nuclear energy or weapon programmes, environmentally-destructive developmental policies etc. but also from sinister exploitations of the socio-religious cleavages in society, peace movements represent a kind of concerted efforts on the part of civil society to suggest an alternative model of peaceful and harmonious life for the people at large. Though the antecedents of peace movements in the country could be traced back to the glorious legacies of a, by and large, peaceful nationalist movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, they attained newer heights and varying dimensions with the changing nature and growing scale of threats to peace. For instance, after independence in 1947, the government of India under the leadership of Jawaharlal

Nehru embarked upon an ambitious course of rapid economic development of the country through constructing large multi-purpose valley projects besides other heavy industrial installations symbolically called the ‘temples of modern India’. Despite causing considerable damage to ecology of the region and emitting other pollutants in the atmosphere, these projects escaped the scrutiny of the peace activists owing to lack of knowledge and awareness regarding their peace-disturbing potential. But in present times, when such developmental projects are planned, they are subjected to strict public scrutiny on various parameters such as displacement, rehabilitation, environmental impact assessment, potential damage to ecology of the region, probable impact on the life and livelihood of the people living in the area, among others. A pertinent example in this context seems to be the proposed Jaitapur Nuclear Power Plant in Maharashtra. In the backdrop of the recent Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan due to earthquake and subsequent Tsunami leading to the radiation in the plant, the peace activists in India appear to be dead against Jaitapur Nuclear Power Plant despite government’s assurance of highest degree of safety measures stipulated for the plant. Peace movements, thus, appear to have gained a new perspective and vigour in the new millennium with growing awareness amongst people, supported by technical input and global experiences provided by advocacy groups regarding the impact of various developmental plans and projects on their life and livelihood.

Aims and Objectives

This Unit would enable you to understand

- The concept and meaning of peace movements
- The genesis, evolution and types of peace movements and
- The issues in peace movements.

12.2 UNDERSTANDING PEACE MOVEMENTS

Conceptually, a peace movement is understood as a new social movement aimed at galvanising public opinion through advocacy and concerted action on the plans, policies and projects having potential to cause serious threat to peaceful existence of the people. Peace movements are reckoned to be new social movements owing to their inception in the post-Second World War times to take up the unconventional issues, technologies and policies that are found to be destructive of peace, both at the global as well as local levels. In a way, peace movements may be construed to be some sort of umbrella movements as they encompass many other social movements within their fold with the common objective of securing peace in society. The key word, therefore, in proper understanding of peace movements is ‘peace’. Clearly, peace need not be understood here in a narrow sense of just absence of war. On the contrary, peace ought to be conceptualised in a broader sense to include indicatively, if not exhaustively, means of a decent livelihood, liberation from social, economic and political violence, access to natural resources for a satisfying livelihood, cultural autonomy, and freedom from all those policies and actions that may endanger a dignified life in peace.

However, given the fact that each of the above mentioned subjects are of paramount importance meriting autonomy of conceptualisation, quite often autonomous social movements are initiated on such issues. Yet, in the ultimate analysis, the objective of all such movements seems to be saving the people from violence and distress, and secure a

peaceful life for them. In the discourse of peace movements, therefore, the idea of security does not remain confined to the realm of national security but extends to the notion of 'human security' which means a happy and meaningful life in peace. Ordinarily, most of the new social movements appear to be in the nature of peace movements despite being known by different nomenclatures on the basis of the issue dominating the movement. Like other social movements, peace movements are not simply a sudden, spontaneous and temporary outburst of the people's anger against an issue. Rather, they are organised protests against certain issues, policies or projects of the government having potential to disturb peace in the region and thereby likely to create violent ruptures in life of the people. Thus, they have definite goals and objectives to achieve for which they use certain peaceful means, methods, strategies and tactics. Their motive is to convince and mobilise people to become part of their campaign to pressurise the government to accept their point of view on a given issue.

12.3 TYPES OF PEACE MOVEMENTS

The existence of a variety of social movements apparently working on the issues of peace and dignified life for people creates a mosaic of peace movements in the country. Scholars have tried to classify peace movements in India into two categories on the basis of approach towards peace that these movements adopt (Manivannan, 1988, pp.7-8). In this regard, the first group consists of the Gandhian institutions, scholars, activists and sympathisers who advocate and practise a non-violent approach of alternative models of peace and development embedded in the Gandhian thought and action. Such activities and thinking are rooted in an intrinsic critique of modernity and modern methods of socio-economic development that inherently involve pain to one for the gain of others. The main vehicle to carry forward the Gandhian peace movement to all nook and corners of the country are supposed to be the numerous Gandhi Ashrams established by the devoted Gandhians in the areas of their living and activity. These Ashrams, in fact, happen to be the hub of activities in constructive, peaceful and austere life for the people having faith in Gandhian thought and action. As Manivannan writes succinctly, 'They remain not only the main sources of inspiration for the nonviolent movement but are themselves engaged in confronting basic problems of security and survival of the people. This nonviolent movement, having its bases at various Gandhian Ashrams, consists of people (functioning as of both conscientious intellectuals and grass root activists) determined to contribute their lives to the most fundamental issues of peace and survival' (Manivannan, 1988, p.7).

The second category of peace movements is an amalgam of various autonomous movements working in different walks of life with the common purpose of securing dignified life in peace for the people. This group consists of both the conventional social movements such as socio-religious reform movements, civil rights movements, peasants and workers movements as well as new social movements like student's movements, women's movements, anti-nuclear protest movements, environmental movements, human rights movements, right to information movements, anti-corruption movements and movements for good governance. Owing to the primacy of a given issue, though these movements are usually single issue movements, yet they are not oblivious of the overlap that their cause unmistakably has with the cause of other social movements going on at different places and times. 'Working in their own areas, they gradually came to realize that most negative developments in India were linked not only to each other but also to the problems of militarization and misguided development. Single-issue groups in dialogue with each other discovered the link between national defence policy and underdevelopment, nuclear

weapons and nuclear power, industrialization and crime, the green revolution and ecological destruction, development and the loss of cultural autonomy and so forth' (Manivannan, 1988, p.8). Such a subtle realisation made the sporadic peace movements to be in periodic consultation and support with each other and, on certain occasions, evolve a common front to provide renewed vigour and strength to their movements.

12.4 GENESIS AND EVOLUTION OF PEACE MOVEMENTS

As a civilisation, India has been a champion of peaceful and dignified life for all in an unparallel manner. The classic case has been that of Gautam Buddha who, despite being born in a royal family, was so disturbed by the pathetic and miserable conditions of common people that he renounced the worldly comfort to become the messenger of peace and social harmony not only in India but also other parts of the world as well. Similarly, emperor Ashoka also became a torchbearer of futility of war and value of peace even after emerging victorious in one of the bloodiest wars he fought. He even sent his beloved ones as special emissaries to different parts of the world on peace expeditions to spread the message of peace and harmony in social life. Moreover, it may be argued that value of peace is intrinsic and natural in the Indian psyche as all religions, great personalities, socio-cultural value systems as well as daily chores of life reflect unmistakable appreciation for the value of peace.

In modern times, the roots of peace movements in India may be traced back to the mammoth nationalist movement conducted under the spirited leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Significantly, given the Indian mentality of privileging peace over violence, the main course of Indian national movement remained peaceful at all the times. But certain young and overenthusiastic nationalists sought to win quick freedom for the country through armed and violent struggle thereby introducing the element of violence also in the by and large peaceful national struggle. Hence, in order to prune the mainstream national movement even from an iota of violence, Gandhi reinvented the classical Indian concepts of Ahimsa and Satyagraha and elevated them to become sine quo non in conducting a peaceful national movement. In a way, therefore, the biggest peace movements in pre-independent India such as non-cooperation movement, civil disobedience movement etc. were initiated by Gandhi against the British rule in the country. What was typical in the Gandhian peace movements was that they were not one-shot affair but conducted as successive steps towards achieving a long-cherished goal of freedom for the motherland. Intermittently, after a movement was withdrawn and another movement was still not initiated, the interregnum was utilised by Gandhi for carrying out constructive programmes of nation-building in order to further cement the ultimate cause of securing swaraj or self-rule, not only in terms of political independence but also social, economic and spiritual emancipation for the common people. Such constructive programmes became the hallmark of peace movements in early years of independent India. The nationalistic fervour of pre-independence times continued even after independence and the orientations of peace movements in the country turned towards realising Gandhi's dream of establishing '*Ram rajya*' through numerous constructive programmes of development in different walks of life. Thus, for a fairly long period of time after independence, the peace movements remained focused on socio-economic reconstruction in typical Gandhian mould through the innumerable Gandhian Ashrams set up in different parts of the country.

12.5 DEVELOPMENT OF PEACE MOVEMENTS

Peace movements in the form of protest movements became widespread in India during the second half of the decade of seventies in the wake of certain fundamental changes taking place in political, strategic and developmental landscape of the nation. In this context, the issue that pioneered peace movements in the form of protest movements may arguably be taken to be the nuclear energy and subsequently nuclear armaments. Embarking on the path of massive economic development after gaining independence, India was short of energy resources from the very beginning. So, amongst the different sources of energy, the policy makers also decided to utilise the nuclear fissile material as a source of clean and assured energy to meet the developmental needs of various sectors of economy. With the passage of the Atomic Energy Act, 1962, the stage appeared set for massive use of nuclear energy in the country. Such an uncritical acceptance of a potentially harmful material for widespread production of power raised the eyebrows of peace activists in the country who were quite well aware of the catastrophe of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during Second World War. Moreover, the ongoing peace movements against nuclear energy and armaments in other parts of the world, particularly Western Europe, also gave credence to the arguments of peace activists that nuclear energy can never be a peaceful and safe option for power sufficiency in the country. The flashpoint in anti-nuclear peace movements in India came in 1974 when the so-called peaceful programme of nuclear energy of the country was militarised by exploding a nuclear device at Pokharan in Rajasthan. Now, no inhibition was left in minds of the peace activists that Indian nuclear programme is essentially meant for military purposes and the bogey of peaceful energy was raised only to conceal its true character. Thereafter, formidable fronts were created to protest against not only the militarised nuclear programme but also the peaceful nuclear energy programme of the country. It was argued that nuclear power cannot be safe at any cost and its potential danger for the life and livelihood of the people would ever render it as the greatest threat to peace at any given time. Peace organisations and campaigns such as The Committee for Sane Nuclear Policy (COSNUP), Network to Oust Nuclear Energy (NONE), Citizens Against Nuclear Energy (CANE), Media Collective, Group for Nuclear Disarmament (GROUND), National Association of Indian Doctors for the Prevention of Nuclear War, Anu Urja Jagriti, amongst others, initiated concerted efforts to awaken people against the dangerous portents of nuclear energy and enlist their support in making government abandon the policy of increasing nuclearisation of energy sector and defence preparedness.

Women's movement also formed a crucial part of peace movements in India that started gaining salience in the decade of seventies. Importantly, with the United Nations stipulating the decade of seventies as the International Decade for Women, the stage appeared set for both the governmental as well as the Non-governmental organisations to take up the issues of women's development on priority basis. While the governmental pursuits were confined to the formulation of policies and programmes of women's development in the straightjacket of conventional five year plans, in addition to creation of certain specific institutional mechanisms to implement such policies and programmes, the major contentious issues found their articulation in the autonomous women's movement started in various parts of the country. The focus of these movements such as the anti-price rise movement of 1970s, the Chipko women's movement in the hills of Uttar Pradesh, the SEWA initiative in Gujarat, the Vasai-Virar Women's struggles in Thane district of Maharashtra for water etc. have had, unmistakably been on the issues of peaceful and dignified survival

and managing the basic objects of life like food, fodder, water, self-employment, easy and affordable availability of essential supplies of life etc. Thus, instead of clamouring for an enhanced and effective role in the institutions and processes of political decisions making in the country, these women's movements confined their operational domain only to essentially non-political issues pertaining to the basic livelihood issues. However, when it was realised by the women's groups that without gaining sufficient space in the institutions and processes of political decision making, the idea of empowerment of women would not reach its logical conclusion, they started focusing on that aspect as well. Thus, rising above the issues of day to day life, the women's movement gained the clamour for political assertiveness to obtain the due share of women in political decision making process by the decade of 1990s. Setting the scene in this regard happens to be the Constitution 73rd and 74th amendment enacted in 1993 pertaining to the rural and urban local self-government bodies respectively which stipulated the constitutionally guaranteed reservation of seats for the women in the ratio of not less than 1/3rd in all such bodies. Taking clue from this somewhat revolutionary move, the women's groups in various parts of the country started demanding the extension of such reservation in the higher legislative bodies at both the central as well as the state level also, i.e. in the Legislative Assemblies of the states and the two houses of Parliament. Thus, since 1996, most of the political parties have unfailingly been promising in their election manifestos to provide for 33% of reservation of seats for women in the higher legislative bodies. However, the probable apprehension of the male members in most of the political parties, of losing the grip over the commanding positions in the politics, on the one hand, and in view of the sustained resistance emanating from certain vested interest serving political parties, on the other, the move towards ensuring the 33% reservation in the seats of higher legislative bodies in the country remains a distant dream despite the hue and cry being raised periodically on the issue.

Environmental movements have also emerged as important constituents of peace movements in India. As matter of fact, the roots of environmental conflicts in India lie in the adoption of a particular model of development in the country after independence. Between the two available somewhat, if not complete, indigenous models of development, namely the Gandhian and the Nehruvian models, the political leadership of the country unhesitatingly went for the latter in utter disregard for the former. Conceptually, the Gandhian model of economic development was very much eco-friendly owing to its emphasis on small scale industries, village and cottage industries, local production and consumption of the things utilising the locally available resources and decentralised economy and polity, with complete rejection of the idea of heavy industrialisation and commercial exploitation of resources for the sake of profit and amassing of wealth by few people. As against this, the Nehruvian model of development, drawing its ideological inspiration and practical implementation from the system prevailing in the Soviet Union, was rooted in the mode of centrally planned economic development of the economy with stress on heavy industrialisation in the state sector, adoption of capital-intensive in place of labour-intensive technologies of development and creation of mega developmental projects in various parts of the country irrespective of the environmental and human costs involved in the execution of such projects. Hence, in the early decades of India's independence, the construction of the modern temples of independent India went unopposed presumably due to the ignorance of the people regarding the environmental cost involved in such projects on the one hand, and the lack of concerted and formidable movements to fight for the cause of environmental issues in the country on the other.

However, with the proliferation of Nehruvian model of development in all the nooks and corners of the country by the 1970s, the realisation started dawning in the minds of the people to oppose the excessive commercial exploitation of the natural resources to the detriment of the fragile ecosystem. In view of the able leadership being given to such movements, the environmental movements turned out to be new pedestals of waging people's struggle against the oppressive and anti-peoples policies of the governments. In this context, three types of environmental movements have been experienced in the country since 1970s. First, the inception of the environmental movements in India may be reckoned to be the agitation of the people to assert their rights over the access to and use of forest products as against the state sponsored move of allowing the commercial exploitation of forests by the private interests. Championed by the illiterate and politically novice female dominant sections of the people, the high point in such movements happen to be the Chipko Movement of the Uttaranchal during the first half of 1970s. Taking clue and inspiration from the Chipko Movement, a number of other forest movements were also started in various parts of the country like the Appiko Movement in Karnataka, Bharat Jana Andolan in Bastar etc. which succeeded in highlighting the centrality of the forest resources in the life of the native peoples and inculcated the spirit of struggle in the people to fight for their cherished possessions.

Next, the conflicts over the marine and hydraulic resources have also gained momentum during the 1980s and 1990s on the issue of over-exploitation of marine resources for commercial purposes. Chilka Bachao Andolan of Orissa is the classic example when the people of the region consisting mainly of the local fishermen struggled against the proposed harmful and commercial ventures like the mechanised fishing, deep sea fishing and related marine farming. Later on, such struggles extended to the protection of the riverbeds from the encroachment by the government agencies in the name of various types of developmental activities, a fine example of which happens to be the on-going campaign in the name of 'Save Yamuna Campaign' to protest against the construction of the games village for the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi on the river beds of the Yamuna. Finally, the environmental movements have also taken up the cudgels against the big dams and the large multipurpose river valley projects in recent times. Starting with the Silent River Valley Project of Kerala during the 1970s, the struggles against the big dams gained currency during the struggle against Tehri Dam in Uttaranchal and the Narmada Valley Project in Gujarat in recent times.

12.6 PEACE EDUCATION

The growing network of peace movements in India has also induced intellectuals and activists to introduce peace education in few institutions of higher learning. The basic idea behind including peace studies in the academic curricula is to facilitate a clear understanding amongst the common people in general and prospective peace workers in particular the complexities and issues of peace and threats to peace. In the beginning, the courses on peace studies remained confined to the universities having chairs or departments involved in teaching and research on Gandhian thought and action. The trendsetters in this regard are Department of Gandhian Studies, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala; Centre for Studies on Peace and Non-violence, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati; Peace Research Centre, Gujarat Vidyapeeth, Ahmedabad; and Institute of Gandhian Thought and Peace Studies, University of Allahabad, Allahabad.

A new impetus to peace education was provided at the dawn of the twenty-first century

in India on account of two reasons. First, with the increasing conflict situations both within and outside the country involving issues of development, livelihood, gender-related violence, environmental degradation, militarisation of nuclear programmes, deficit of trust and governance in governmental institutions etc., the peace activists endeavoured to make the value of peace and non-violence cherished by as many people as possible in order to avoid violence and disorder in society. In this project, the educational institutions at various levels were found to be of greater use given the persuasive value of education on the minds of people. Second, in order to diversify the field of education by promoting greater emphasis on interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary studies, and also starting programmes like Gandhian and Peace Studies as independent courses of study, the government provided better incentives for more and more universities and scholars to take up peace studies on priority basis. Subsequently, increasing number of universities started establishing Gandhi Bhawans, Gandhi Study Circles and Department of Gandhian Thought and Action, and Centres for Peace and Conflict Resolutions. Moreover, now peace studies became truly interdisciplinary as scholars, researchers and practitioners from across disciplines and professions adopted Gandhian and Peace Studies as their full time areas of interest. In recent times, with government placing renewed focus on nuclear energy, peace education is taken as a vehicle of mass education on the issue of adverse effects of nuclear energy both in times of war and peace. Activists are being trained to give effective leadership to the people opposed to the setting up of nuclear power projects in their areas. For instance, concerted efforts of the peace activists in tandem with the local people are creating formidable stumbling blocks in the way of establishing a nuclear power project at Jaitapur in Maharashtra. So, peace education has turned out to be an effective tool in the hands of the peace activists to arouse and mould public opinion against issues and activities threatening peace and initiate sustained efforts to compel the government to eschew such policies and activities.

12.7 ISSUES IN PEACE MOVEMENTS

Despite having come of age, peace movements in India face a number of challenges in becoming a decisive factor in shaping the broad contours of life and livelihood of common people. Irrespective of the fact that India is home to the eternal virtues of peace and non-violence since time immemorial, the masses do not seem to be sufficiently aware of the inter-linkages amongst unsustainable development, nuclear energy, nuclear armaments, societal cleavages and tensions and their impact on fragility of peace and dignified life in society. As a result, majority of people are unable to appreciate the value of cause being espoused by the peace movements in normal times. Moreover, even if some of them are appreciative of the cause of peace movements, such appreciation does not reach the level of being converted into strong support and participation in peace movements. So, the peace movements have onerous task before them in enlightening the common people on the virtue of peace, even slight neglect of which may prove catastrophic for them.

Peace movements in India appear to suffer from the duality of foreign and indigenous sources of inspiration and action. For a long time, drawing their inspiration from the West European peace movements, Indian peace movements remained focused on the issues of nuclear energy and militarisation of nuclear programme in the country. Even on these issues, instead of making masses aware of the ominous portents of nuclear energy for their life and livelihood, peace movements allowed them to become city-based advocacy groups busy in research and publication aimed at providing critique of government policies

without making concerted efforts to get them reversed. Moreover, such issues did not have to do much with the day to day chores of life of the common people. Hence, they could not become active and willing partners in the peace movements.

On the other hand, the indigenous roots of peace movements in the form of Gandhian techniques of Ahimsa and Satyagraha were either ignored or misunderstood to have relevance only for waging monumental struggles such as the national movement. In cases where Gandhian thought and action was taken to be the core concern, most of the efforts were found to be in putting Gandhian constructive programmes into action. The policies and programmes aimed at disturbing peace around them in the name of developmental activities were, by and large, ignored by the Gandhian peace activists. So, it was left to the common people to fend for themselves if they could discern the real intent and implication of such peace disturbing activities. In other words, Ahimsa and Satyagraha could never become the preferred instruments of protest and persuasion in the hands of the peace activists to a large extent.

Owing to lack of vision and long term perspective, peace movements in India remained, more or less, episodic, disorganised, incohesive, academic, and elitist. In many cases, peace movements by NGOs are found to serve the interests of their organisers more than the interest of the issue in hand. Such incidents not only created wedge amongst stakeholders of peace movements but also convinced the government of their inability to evolve a deterrent mass movement in protest of its sinister development designs. Otherwise, there is no plausible explanation for government's plans of rapid nuclearisation of energy sector in the country despite strong protests from the peace activists and local people.

12.8 SUMMARY

In spite of certain discomfitures, peace movements have travelled a long way in India traversing numerous difficult terrains. Under the influence of the West European peace movements, though, for some times, Indian peace movements remained engrossed with the issues of nuclear energy and possible nuclear arms race in the region, the peculiarity of Indian social and economic contexts made them change their vision and approach to the issues of peace and non-violence very soon. Consequently, they graduated from being just single issue (nuclear energy/weapons) movement to become one of the most diverse and inclusive peace movements in the world. Clearly, inclusion of issues like environmental protection, women's rights, development-displacement conundrum, human rights, communal harmony, social inclusion, rights of tribal people over forests, among others, helped peace movements reach far and wide in the country. Retaining peace as the central component of their plan, innumerable movements are active in various parts of India seeking a peaceful life and decent livelihood for the people. Supposedly, with the kind of development policies being pursued by the government in which issues of life and livelihood of common people appear to be relegated to background for the interests of corporate houses, peace movements are likely to be the only appropriate instruments in the hands of people to reclaim their right to peaceful and dignified life. Here, the onus of responsibility squarely lies on the proponents of peace movements to provide sustained and concerted leadership to such movements in order to help them reach their logical conclusion.

12.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What do you understand by peace movements? Analyse different types of peace movements.
2. Trace the origin and evolution of peace movements.
3. How can peace education be considered as a tool for establishing peace?

SUGGESTED READINGS

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