

Models of Social Action

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Introduction

The literal meaning of 'Model' is the modality or style or pattern of doing a particular thing, which is replicable. Conceptually, a model is an aid to complex theoretical activity and directs our attention to concepts or variables and their inter-relationships. A 'model' of social action means a peculiar way or process of achieving set goals with certain identifiable stages and characteristics. Stated differently, social action, in its process of achieving its objectives, adopts certain manner or modality, which is termed as 'model of social action'.

Social action can be undertaken by the elites exclusively without the participation of the masses. It can also be carried out by the elites with a greater or lesser degree of participation of the clientele. It can also be initiated and led entirely by the beneficiaries or the community people themselves. To exemplify, in one type or model, certain elite people initiate and conduct social action without involving the target population. Raja Ram Mohan Roy worked for social legislation against 'sati-pratha'. In another way or model, the target population takes up the total charge of the social movement in its own hands, though under the guidance of their leaders. For instance, freedom movement for our country was carried out under the guidance of Gandhiji.

It would be worthwhile to examine the characteristics and inter-relationships of these models. The emphasis

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in a particular model therefore should be the guiding principle for its comparison with other models. In a particular instance, social action may be initiated by an institution or an agency but may not have become institutionalized. It may be in the process of being so. Similarly, people may have initiated action but the same may have changed its character by becoming institutionalized.

Models of Social Action

There are two main models of social action as given by Britto (1984). They are:

- 1) Elitist Social Action
- 2) Popular Social Action

When social action is carried out by the elite exclusively or with marginal participation of the masses, it is termed as 'elitist social action'. Elite social action is essentially a group action. The other model of social action is termed 'popular social action' in which either the elite incorporate the clientele in the process or the beneficiaries themselves carry it out. Three sub-models can be identified in each type of social action. Let us take a look at both the models in some detail.

Elitist Social Action: It is the action initiated and conducted by the elites for the benefit of the masses. In this model of social action, general public or the target group is not involved. The three sub-models of elitist social action are:

- 1) **Legislative Social Action Model:** It is a process in which elite groups conduct studies on the gravity, extent and urgency of the problems, create public opinion and lobby to try to modify the social policy. Here, the general population or the target group is not involved directly in the

process. Some elites either themselves or along with like-minded individuals take-up the social issues, which they think can be related to the pressing problem. They do lobbying and other similar activities in order to achieve some benefits for the entire segment of people or prevent some maladies from affecting their clientele or to remove some problem that is hindering their growth. How is such type of social action conducted?

The elites set up or be a part of commissions and conduct studies on the social problem they consider crucial. After conducting studies on the gravity, extent and urgency of the problem, they chalk out scientific, feasible interventions, create public opinion and do lobbying. Following this, they discuss the matter with the concerned officials and Ministers and persuade them to take up appropriate interventions. In this way the elites get the rule, law and appropriation approved. They also assist in proper implementation of the new policy.

Social legislations like 'Child Labour (Prohibition and Prevention) Act 1986; Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961; Sati Prevention Act (revised) 1987; Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act 1956; Juvenile Justice Act, 1986; Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 are the results of the legislative social action carried out by the elites.

- 2) **Economic Sanction Model:** In this type of social action, the elites, by gaining control over some economic, social, political or religious weapon try to obtain benefits for the society. In this process, the elites gain control over some economic resources and use it as a threat to obtain benefits for their clientele. For example, labour officer in a shoe making industry was sensitive enough towards the felt needs of the female labourers

who wanted some time off to feed their infants. The authority of the industry put their stand clearly that if any female worker takes the time off, her pay would be deducted. There were fifteen such females out of 90 female staff who wanted the time off. The labour officer held a meeting with the female staff and asked the opinion of all on this issue. He said that tomorrow any other female might be in the position of these 15 lactating mothers. After a series of meetings, all the females agreed to stand united for special privileges given to them. The authorities first disagreed. However, later, when the whole staff threatened to go on indefinite strike and persuasion from the labour officer giving the reference of Maternity Benefit Act 1961, they agreed to give in to the demands of the female staff. Not only this, a small crèche was also opened for the infants and children of the female staff.

- 3) **Direct Physical Model:** It is a process where elites take the law in their own hands and punish those responsible for the cause of injustice and thus try to bring about benefits to their clientele. The NGOs working for the welfare and development of the child labour got united and initiated a Campaign Against Child Labour (CACL) throughout the country. It was realized that mere formulation of Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act is not enough to provide security and justice to the children working in formal and informal sectors. So a campaign was initiated in 1992 at the national level to work for eradication of child labour and ensuring the fundamental right to education for them. The NGO workers carried out rallies, marches, dharnas and did sit-ins against the apathy of the government as well as the greed of employers who ruin the lives of millions of children for their profits and selfish motives.

Another example of direct physical model of social action is the naxalite movement. Naxalites took law in their own hands and started punishing the feudal oppressors. Their action has drawn national attention to the problems of the rural poor and as a result several reform measures have been announced. Land reform gathered momentum after the outbreak of Naxalbari activities. However, it may be reminded that Naxalite movement, though started with the purpose of social justice and power re-distribution, it seems to have lost its goal and has turned out to be no better than a terroristic activity. A more typical example of this model would be freedom struggle carried out by the Indian revolutionary groups.

Popular Social Action: It is the second type of social action model given by Britto. In the popular social action model, a large section of people with or without elite participation is involved. They aim their confrontational/conflictive action against the unjust and dehumanizing structures, agencies, policies, procedures or oppressive agents. Direct mobilization model, dialectical model and the conscientization models are the sub-types of social action. These models differ from each other in some respects and they have some common features, as mentioned below:

- 1) **Conscientization Model:** It is based on Paulo Friere's concept of creating awareness among masses through education. Paulo Friere developed the concept of conscientization, which means educating the people about the oppression, oppressed and the oppressor (their own position in the two groups), their inter-relationship, the power structure and ways to liberate from the oppressed or oppressor class. Friere maintains that the situation when the oppressed and/or

oppressor are conscientized, there exists motivating possibilities for the true liberation of mankind as well as for the most efficient domestication of man. He believed that education can be a tool for re-education and social action. Conscientization process results not merely in learning of literary skills, but it is intended to assist the participants to liberate themselves from all structures, which inhibit the realization of their full humanity through action-reflection-action. This form of social action involves maximum participation of the concerned population. People are given opportunity to analyse and understand the social structures, which circumscribe their life. To know is to change; and so they are invited to transform the structures through the means of their choice. As a result of humanization, it is hoped that the oppressed do not become oppressors in their turn. In the present situation, this model of social action is being extensively used in several countries.

Field example: An NGO working in a resettlement colony in Kolkata has taken up the issue of discriminatory treatment done against the girl child at the familial, community and society level. The prejudices and gender bias in our patriarchal social structure have most often given lesser share to girl in the distribution of family resources, be it nutrition, education or other opportunities for development. The NGO made use of street plays, emotional speeches, debates, documentary films, etc., to conscientize the people towards the vulnerability and exploitation of female children. Issues of female infanticide/feticide, poor health and malnutrition, school drop-outs, low wages, torture for dowry, rape, molestation and many more were projected through various means. With the use of conscientization model of social action, the NGO was able to make a little difference in the negative and indifferent attitudes of general

public towards girl child.

- 2) **Dialectical Mobilization Model:** It helps in promoting conflict to exploit the contradictions in a system, with the belief that a better alternative system will emerge as a result. Dialectic means the art of logical disputation. This process involves an initial proposition (thesis), which is inadequate and generates a counter proposition (antithesis) and the rational context of both are taken up into the synthesis. In other words when individuals or groups take up extreme positions and argue, the position of one may be taken as the thesis and that of the other as antithesis. The result of their argumentation, a certain conclusion acceptable to both, may be termed synthesis. Thus, the posing of contradictory positions and arriving at a better conclusion is termed dialectics in logic. Actionists who follow a dialectical process take the logical to the ontological. They assume that all forces in nature and human institutions, clash and develop. Every institution and every social force contains in itself the element of its own disintegration. They expose the contradictions within a system, promote conflicts and expect a higher-order-result in the social-economic-political structures.

Field Example: An NGO in Kerala is creating awareness among the general public about human rights and electoral reforms. Use of posters, distribution of booklets in local language on electoral reform, speeches and group discussions were held to make the people aware that their voting right is very powerful tool in creating a just society and that right should be used very judiciously. Money and muscle power should not be the criteria for giving votes to any candidate. Just a fortnight before Assembly elections, the NGO organised group discussions with the aspiring

candidates and sitting MLAs in various constituencies. The perception of people's problems and their probable solutions were discussed. The general public attended the discussions. The NGO people anchored the discussions, which often led to heated arguments and conflicts. Through logical disputation, the general public was made aware of the credibility of the candidates and an appeal was made to give their vote to the deserving candidates and not to get lured away by any temporary favours offered to them by these candidates. Usage of dialectical mobilization model of social action for electoral reform proved quite useful in enabling the people to establish a clean democratic political institution in their respective areas.

- 3) **Direct Mobilization Model of Popular Social Action:** In direct mobilization model, specific issues are taken up by the social actionists and the masses are mobilized to resort to protests and strikes to achieve the objectives. In this process, the leaders or elites pick up specific grievances or issues that are affecting the people at large. They analyse the causal factors, which are at the root of the injustice. They formulate the alternative policies and procedures and mobilize the masses for protest activities for the purpose of achieving the set objectives.

Let us take the example of the fish workers' movement to understand the direct mobilization model in a better way. During post independence period, a large number of trawlers and mechanized boats entered in the fishing sector. This led to massive over fishing to capture lucrative foreign markets. Their fishing method destroyed several species of fish. The imbalance, thus created in the eco-system, led to lowering of the stock available for traditional fishermen. Mechanization in the fishing sector put poor fishermen

at the mercy of moneylenders, merchants, exporters and multinationals. The government was apathetic.

The fish workers united together and raised their voice against the issue. They developed a well-structured organisation and started their protest. As the movement started spreading from blocks to districts, the leaders formed union to bargain their demands with the government. The movement expanded to the coastal areas of Kerala, Karnataka, Tamilnadu, Goa and Maharashtra and later to other states also. The union forced the governments to make suitable policies and programmes to secure their livelihood and maintain eco-balance.

A Commentary on Social Action Models as given by Britto: The main difference between the two types, Elitist and popular social action, lies in the fact that in the elitist social action, the masses are not involved either in determining the goal or the strategy, or even in action. Popular social action on the other hand involves mobilization of the masses for their own betterment. There is a loophole in the elitist sponsored social action. Though elitist social action may result in some benefits to some segment of the population, by and large the real issues will not be tackled. The elitist concept of the problems of the weaker sections and the solutions offered will inevitably be determined by their own value system, which may not be in conformity with how the weaker sections themselves perceive their problems and how they want to solve them.

In addition to the above mentioned models of social action, Singh (1984) also describes certain other models of social action. The approaches taken in all these models of social action might be overlapping. Let us take a look at other models of social action.

Loka-Sakti Model of Social Action: This is the classic model of mass mobilization which attempts to bring

about the desired change in social structure from the perspective of Gandhian social work. There are two major view-points or approaches in the tradition of Gandhian constructive work. One group believe that constructive social work can gradually bring about the desired change within the existing legal and constitutional framework. The stress, here, is on educating people and appealing to the conscience of those who possess property and power to sacrifice it. Constructive work, along with awareness generation, undertakes programmes with state support for community reconstruction.

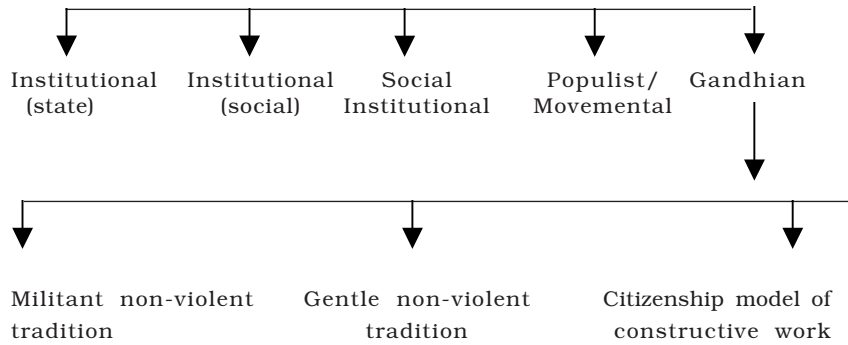
The other group of Gandhians maintain that the need of radical activism or massive changes in the social institutions arises when the state machinery or constitutional means fail to deliver services to the community adequately. As a result there is a need for mass action. Their conception of Gandhian socialism aims at eliminating exploitation and poverty; provision of equal opportunity to all for self-development; full development of the material and moral resources of the society and their adequate appropriation. They believe that in a socialist society, people are voluntarily prepared to give in their own interests and wishes to the larger interests of the society. Such a kind of socialism cannot be achieved only through political action; social action is also needed. Sarvodaya is taken as a social movement aimed at individual and social action. Emphasis is laid on revolution in thought and method, the role of citizen, the need for loka shakti (people's power) and loka sammati (people's consent) for building up swaraj (self-governance) and su-raj (good-governance).

The concept of loka-shakti is very significant in Gandhian constructive work tradition. Loka-shakti refers to the collective capacity or power of the people, expressed or latent, to deliberate, decide and act together. Loka-shakti, in order to be effective,

must have the quality of ethical virtues and appeal, and it must use non-violent methods for social change. The underlying thought behind the concept of loka shakti is that unless the energies and capacities of the community people are mobilized, and they become self-reliant and capable of taking initiative collectively and voluntarily, their development would undoubtedly be slow especially in a democracy. Loka-shakti is the essence of democracy. The state power (rajya-shakti) cannot fulfill its objectives without loka-shakti.

From the above description it may be inferred that different models of social action incorporate different perspectives. Some questions as to what is the conception of society, what are the goals that are sought to be achieved through social action, with what means and methods, what are the respective roles of people and the state and what is the ideology — determine the basis on which one or the other model rests. The social action might be initiated by elites or the beneficiaries themselves or even by the state or government. The target of action may be individuals, groups or communities. The action may either visualize their participation, or only that of elites/institutions with people as recipients. In addition, the locus of action again may be state, institutions, associations, groups, and people, and its coverage may be confined to grassroot level, or may even extend to intermediate and macro levels. The action may be active (a need is perceived by an individual, group or agency and becomes the cause of action) or reactive (the action is a response to a situation created by an earlier action). Taking these factors into account, a framework of social action has been described below:

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Institutional and Non-institutional Models

Institutional (state) Model of Social Action: It is the social action initiated by the state or government. Social action by the state generally takes an indirect form, and its aim is to benefit the people with or without their participation. The approach is parliamentary, representational, bureaucratic and elitist. The action is organised or sponsored within the framework of law and may be legalized subsequently. For example, government passes executive orders for regularization of unauthorized settlements of poor in urban settings and also implements programmes for community reconstruction, say, proper sewage, availability of safe drinking water, free immunization and health check-ups.

Institutional-Social Model of Social Action: It visualises social action by non-governmental institutions which are aided or unaided by government. In this model, action is initiated either directly or with the support of the people. Even in certain cases, people's active support is sought in due course of time. In the beginning the action is initiated for the people but subsequently it progresses with and through them. The inherent theme behind such type

of social action is primarily 'welfarist' or providing relief and services to the needy. The action often takes place within the framework of law, such as, social action taken up by NGOs, say, sanitation drive in a slum area or a movement to re-admit school drop-out girls and boys in a community.

Social Institutional Model of Social Action: This type of social action may be organised by the citizens, self-help groups, elites, the deprived and others for their benefit but in its progression and development may seek support from formal groups and institution(s) which may like to espouse its causes. It may be direct, participatory and even radical. Depending upon its success it may institutionalize itself formally or remain a spontaneous and sporadic effort with an informed and critically aware social base and power. The nature of such action may be constitutional or extra-constitutional. The social institutional model can be distinguished from the institutional social model in the sense that in the latter one action is initiated by the institution, say an NGO, and at some stage people are mobilized to participate. On the other hand, in social institutional model people initiate social action and may collaborate with some institution working for the similar cause.

Field Example: In a middle class residential colony in Delhi, the elderly people united themselves to provide better security services for them like initiating a telephone help-line for the elderly people connected to the nearest police-chowki, day and night patrolling to the area by police, giving space in the community centre for starting an elderly club for the aged to spend their free time together with friends and neighbours. The sitting MLA didn't pay much attention to their demands. The elderly people mobilized others too to show their protest. They approached two NGOs working for the care and support to the elderly for

participating in the social action. This is an example of social institutional model of social action.

Populist/Movemental Model of Social Action: The fourth model relies entirely on popular social base and power. It rejects dependency and stresses self-reliance through collective effort, active participation, and continuing education. This is an ideal form of social action in which participants experience thinking, deciding and working together in helping themselves and in the process also strengthen their social base and power. It is an action of the people, for the people and by the people. This type of action may partake of some of the characteristics of a movement and may both be constitutional and extra-constitutional. It may be routinizing or self-terminating.

Field Example: In a village of Rajasthan water scarcity was affecting the life of people badly. Women folk had to walk miles together to fetch some water. In the last summer more than 500 cattle died in need of water. The village people got united to solve the problem. They approached the Block Development Officer and talked to the authorities. The BDO promised to sanction some money for constructing wells and hand-pumps but did not keep his promise even after several follow-ups by the villagers. The village people thought about other alternatives along with persuasion of money allotment from the BDO. They decided to build check-dams to conserve rain-water. The village people collaborated and cooperated and finally constructed two check dams. Some people approached the district collector and requested him to intervene. With persistent persuasion the authorities also released money for building wells and hand-pumps. Their success story motivated people of other villages too.

Gandhian Model of Social Action: Social action of the Gandhian tradition emerges as a class by itself because of its emphasis on spirituality, purity of

means and ends, non-violence as a creed, austerity (limitation of want), and moral re-armament of people. Constructive thinking, mobilization, organisation and action are the essential ingredients of this model. People's power remains the basis in all the three types of social action of this tradition. This model has three sub-types:

Militant non-violent tradition: With non-violence still the base, this tradition or approach calls for political and revolutionary character to the social action. It aims at forceful intervention to bring about radical changes in the social system. It does not rely totally on the peaceful and mere constructive work done at the grassroots level. It believes in re-distribution of power and resources and to achieve this aim it intends to mobilize masses to take action. For example, chipko movement emerged out of the protest against rampant deforestation in the Himalayan hills caused by indiscriminate deforestation for commercial consumption.

Gentle non-violent tradition: The Satyagraha done by Vinoba Bhave for satyagraha and village and community reconstruction explains gentle non-violent form of Gandhian social action. It blends the components of the social (populist-movemental) and the grassroots-institutional (constructive work). Bhudaan (donation of land) and gram-daan (donation of villages) for reconstruction of the Gandhian socialist community are the fine examples of this tradition.

Citizenship model of constructive work: This type of social action concentrates mainly on the grassroot level of social action (citizenship) through the means of education. This type of social action relies on constructive work and believes that necessary changes in the social system would take place in due course of time. It rejects coming in conflict with the authorities, protests and boycotts to achieve the

desired objective of social change. It prefers to lay stress on consensus (Lok-sammati), citizenships role (model) and through it visualizes a revolution in thought and method (Bihar kranti and paddhati kranti).

Gandhian approach further subscribes to the view that the government depends upon the people and not the people on the government. That all exploitation is based on cooperation-willing or forced- of the exploited and therefore there is a need to generate social power – a capacity to control the behaviour of others, directly and indirectly, through action by groups of people which impinges on other groups. Non-violent action is not only a policy for a true Gandhian worker but also a creed, and the constructive programme is considered to be the core of such action.

In all the three traditions of Gandhian social action, people's base is considered primary; a parliamentary approach is regarded as inadequate; and while the last two types concentrate on the solution of social and economic problems, through people building and action, militant non-violent tradition model also adds political dimensions to them. The role of institutions is considered enabling, people-based and supportive in all the three forms-which aims towards the creation of a caring and welfare society as contrasted with welfare state.

The above five models of social action are interrelated phases of a process and its progression from the involvement of institutions to that of the people. These may be contributive, complementary, completing, and even counteracting depending upon their perception of the need situation, goals, approaches and respective roles of the institutions and/or people. These should however, not be treated in as 'either/or' fashion, or as mutually exclusive. Initiative for

an organised effort may spring from one model, only to be seized upon by the others, and to be routinized by the third. Social action is a process of continuing constituency work through education and whenever it is found feeble or absent, it needs to be 'cultivated'.

Conclusion

Model of social action is a particular manner or modality used in the process of social action for achieving its objectives. Britto gives two models of social action as

Elitist social action: The elite carry out social action exclusively by themselves or with marginal participation of the masses. It has three sub-types. Legislative social action model is a process in which elite groups conduct studies on the gravity of the problems, create public opinion and lobby to try to modify the social policy. In economic sanction model the elites, by gaining control over some economic, social, political or religious weapon try to obtain benefits for the clientele. Direct physical model is a process where elites take the law in their own hands and punish those responsible for the cause of injustice and thus try to bring about benefits to their clientele.

Popular social action: A large section of people with or without elite participation take confrontational/conflictive action against the injustice. It also has three sub types. Conscientization model is based on Paulo Friere's concept of creating awareness among masses through education. Dialectical mobilization model helps in promoting conflict to exploit the contradictions in a system, with the belief that a better system will emerge as a result. In direct mobilization model, specific issues are taken up by the social actionists and the masses are mobilized to resort to protests and strikes to achieve the objectives.

There are some other models of social action too as given by Singh. In institutional (state) model social action is initiated by the state or government. In institutional-social model social action is initiated by non-governmental institutions which are aided or unaided by government and later people's active support is sought. In social institutional model social action may be organised by the people for their benefit and they may seek support from formal institutions working in similar field. Populist/movemental model is an action of the people, for the people and by the people. Gandhian model of social action has three sub types: Militant non-violent tradition, Gentle non-violent tradition and Citizenship model of constructive work. Loka shakti is the inherent theme behind Gandhian social action.

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