
Chapter 5

Popular Struggles and Movements

❖ Movement for Democracy in Nepal

- Witnessed an extraordinary popular movement in **April 2006** in order to restore democracy.
- In 1990, democracy was established with the king still nominally remaining the head of the state.
- All the major political parties of Nepal formed a **Seven Party Alliance (SPA)** and organised a four day strike in Kathmandu.
- The movement witnessed active participation of the Maoist insurgents and various other organisations.
- **Main Demands**
 - Restoration of parliament
 - Power to an all-party government
 - A new constituent assembly
- On 24 April 2006, the last day of the ultimatum, the king was forced to concede all the three demands. The SPA chose *Girija Prasad Koirala* as the new Prime Minister of the interim government.
- The SPA and the Maoists came to an understanding about how the new Constituent Assembly was going to be elected.

❖ Bolivia's Water War, 2000

- Bolivia is a poor country in Latin America.
- The World Bank pressurised the government to give up its control of municipal water supply.
- The government sold these rights for the city of Cochabamba to a multi-national company (MNC).

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- The company immediately increased the price of water four times. This led to a spontaneous popular protest.
 - A new alliance of labour, human rights and community leaders forced the officials of the MNC to flee the city and made the government concede to all the demands of the protesters.
 - The contract with the MNC was cancelled and water supply was restored to the municipality at old rates. This came to be known as Bolivia's water war.

❖ **Evolution of Democracy**

- Evolves through popular struggles.
- Usually involves conflict between those groups who have exercised power and those who aspire for a share in power.
- These moments come when the country is going through transition to democracy, expansion of democracy or deepening of democracy.
- Democratic conflict is resolved through mass mobilisation. These conflicts and mobilisations are based on new political organisations which include political parties, pressure groups and movement groups.

❖ **Mobilisation and Organizations**

- In Nepal, democracy was attained through the joined efforts of the Seven Party Alliance, the Nepalese Communist Party (Maoist), labour unions and their federations, organization of the indigenous people, teachers, lawyers and human rights groups.
- In Bolivia, the protest against water privatisation was led by a non-political organisation called FEDECOR. This organisation comprised local professionals, including engineers and environmentalists, farmers who relied on irrigation, factory workers' unions and middle class students. The movement was supported by the Socialist Party. In 2006, this party came to power in Bolivia.

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- Direct participation in competitive politics is done by creating parties, contesting elections and forming governments.
 - Indirect participation in competitive politics is done by forming an organisation and undertaking activities for promoting their interests or their viewpoints. These are called interest groups or pressure groups. Sometimes, people decide to act together without forming organisations.

❖ **Pressure Groups and Movements**

- Pressure groups are organisations that attempt to influence government policies.
- Unlike political parties, pressure groups do not aim to directly control or share political power.
- These organisations are formed when people with common occupation, interests, aspirations or opinions come together in order to achieve a common objective.
- Like an interest group, a movement also attempts to influence politics rather than directly take part in electoral competition.
- Unlike interest groups, movements have a loose organisation.
- Their decision-making is more informal and flexible. They depend much more on spontaneous mass participation than an interest group.

• **Sectional Interest Groups Represent**

- A section of society: Workers, employees, businesspersons, industrialists, followers of a religion, caste groups, etc.
- Their principal concern is the betterment and well being of their members, not society in general. Sometimes, these organisations are not about representing the interest of one section of society.
- They represent some common or general interest that needs to be defended.

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- The members of the organisation may not benefit from the cause that the organisation represents.
 - **Public Interest Groups**
 - Promote collective rather than selective good.
 - They aim to help groups other than their own members.
 - In some instances, the members of a public interest group may undertake activities that benefit them as well as others too.
 - **Movement Groups**
 - Most of the movements are issue specific movements that seek to achieve a single objective within a limited time frame.
 - Others are more general or generic movements that seek to achieve a broad goal in the long term.
 - Movements of this kind tend to have a clear leadership and some organisation.
 - Their active life is usually short.
 - The Nepalese Democratic Movement and Narmada Bachao Andolan are some examples of movement groups.
 - Environmental movement is a label for a large number of organisations and issue-specific movements. National Alliance for Peoples' Movements (NAPM) is an organisation that functions for various movements. Groups struggling on specific issues are constituents of this loose organisation which coordinates the activities of a large number of peoples' movements in our country.

❖ **Influence of Pressure Groups and Movements on Politics**

- They try to gain public support and sympathy for their goals and activities by carrying out information campaigns, organising meetings, filing petitions, etc.
- Most of these groups try to influence the media into giving more attention to these issues.

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- They often organise protest activities such as strikes or disrupting government programmes.
 - Business groups often employ professional lobbyists or sponsor expensive advertisements.
 - Some persons from pressure groups or movement groups may participate in official bodies and committees that offer advice to the government.

❖ **Relationship between Political Parties and Pressure Groups**

- Pressure groups are either formed or led by the leaders of political parties or act as extended arms of political parties. Most of the leaders of such pressure groups are usually activists and leaders of a party.
- Sometimes, political parties grow out of movements.
- Movement groups raise new issues that are taken up by political parties.
- Most of the new leadership of political parties comes from interest or movement groups.

❖ **Is Their Influence Healthy?**

- Governments can often come under pressure from a small group of rich and powerful people that reminds the government of the needs and concerns of ordinary citizens.
- Where different groups function actively, no single group can achieve dominance over society.
- The government gets to hear about what different sections of the population want; thus, leading to a rough balance of power.