

PUBLIC ACTIVISM IN THE FORM OF SOCIAL PROTESTS AND MOVEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Public Activism in independent India has taken shape whenever there arose a need on preserving the rights of the citizens that the Constitution guarantees. In the early 1970s the Chipko Movement witnessed people protesting against deforestation by hugging trees preventing them from being cut down. These actions initiated by a group of women could garner support of thousands of people across the country, voicing for a green movement.

INTRODUCTION

It has happened many a times in history that people of an entire country have come together to protest against injustice. Activism is shaping public opinion and popular discourse in India, influencing government decision-making and policy change. Some events in Indian history like the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 played an important role which were led by small group of people in the British army. Also during Swadeshi Movement, banking on the idea of becoming self-sufficient a lot of Indians came forward in support of the movement and boycotted foreign goods.

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The Narmada Bachao Andolan in 1985 is often cited as example of ‘strength in unity’ of people because it was participated by a large number of Adivasi, farmers, environmentalists, and human rights activist. This protest was against the actions of the government to construct large number of dams near the Narmada river that would disrupt the livelihood of people living in those places. The Assam Movement (1979-1985) was against undocumented illegal immigrants in Assam who were encroaching into the state for years. It was a revolution of the indigenous people of the state

to protect their rights, led by All Assam Students Union and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad compelling the government to identify and expel illegal immigrants.[1]

The infamous case of *Tukaram and Another v. State of Maharashtra*, sparked off uncurbed conflicts when the whole nation was shocked by the decision of the Supreme Court. A young girl named Mathura was allegedly raped by police officers while she was in their custody. The judgement delivered by Jaswant Singh J., Kailasam J., and Koshal J. were highly criticised for its logical, legal and linguistic fallacies which also seemed to involve ambiguous and sexist tone. The judgement read, “It could not be deduced that the girl has been subjected to or was under any fear or compulsion such as would justify an inference of any “passive submission”. The accused were acquitted following which the concept of ‘consent’ in the judgement was protected by law. Professors by writing an open letter to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court failed to distinguish between “active consent” and “passive submission”. Such submission due to fear cannot imply submission. This case received extensive media coverage and spontaneous widespread protests and demonstrations by women’s organizations who demanded a review of the judgement.[2]

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR PUBLIC ACTIVISM

First there was the Independence movement, then the anti-Emergency movement, then the Mandal movement for reservation, and over the decades, many more have produced Indians with a deep social commitment. Just like the rest of the world, talking about our history, protests have time and again helped to keep a check on government actions. Activist movements gain popular support among people and other educated class because they are instrumental in popularising scientific reasoning and concepts of Liberty, Equality and Freedom.

Hashtag Activism

Hashtag activism is the act of fighting for or supporting a cause that people are advocating through social media like Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and other networking websites. It does not require much effort from a person unlike on-ground public activism other than sharing or “liking” a post or “retweeting” tweets. Hashtags (#) are often liberally used to spread word about a cause over social media. Hence, the term Hashtag activism is simultaneously used with the term social activism. It’s a product of the 21st century and the society is still learning the cause and effects of such a form of activism. The millennial demography participates the most in hashtag activism with

a real desire to contribute to a good cause. The critics of this movement believe that it is a way of allowing.[3]

CONCLUSION

Indian cyber laws have no direct provision governing rumors on social and electronic media. The Information Technology (IT) Act, however, imposes a limited liability on intermediaries such as search engine giant Google for providing a platform to any objectionable content. While exempting intermediaries from liability for any third party content, Section 79 of the IT Act imposes an obligation on them to remove any such content pursuant to takedown notices by law enforcement agencies.

The government wants to potentially look at regulating digital media and is constituting this committee because a lot of issues like fake news are not directly covered under the IT Act. The parameters for due diligence for social media entities are not defined under the IT Act. There are no direct provisions for it under the Act, but fake news can still be covered under the Indian Penal Code.

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