

You may have witnessed many movements in which people participate in large numbers, try to understand some problem or the other, decide in favour of some form of change and campaign actively for it. You may even have participated in some of them. Recall some such movement you have read about in the newspapers or participated in. What were the problems, who were the people affected, what did they want, who led the movement, how were the people persuaded to join the movement, were there any differences within the movement, how did the movement proceed and to what extent they achieved their objectives?

### Background

The world during the first half of the 20th century was dominated by the great wars, revolutions, emergence of German Fascism, Soviet Socialism, Western liberalism, national liberation movements etc. However, with the end of the Second World War and the independence of colonies and semi-colonies like India, China, Indonesia, Nigeria and Egypt by mid 1950's a new era began in the world. This was an era of economic growth and prosperity for most of the countries, but also of growing tensions in many countries. Sections of societies which had long been denied equal rights came out asserting their rights.



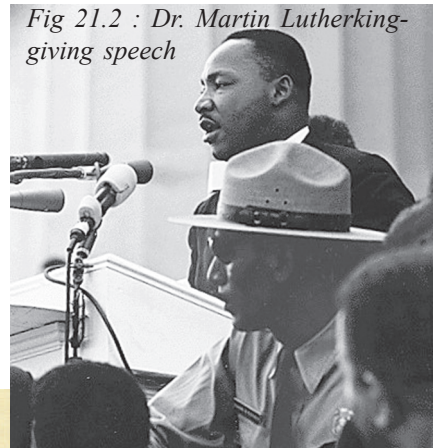
*Fig 21.1 : Photograph by Will C. of Elizabeth Eckford a black girl attempting to enter Little Rock School on 4th September 1957.*

### Civil Rights and Other Movements of 1960s

One of the most important such movements was the American Civil Rights Movement. It fought for equal treatment of Afro-Americans or Black Americans and against rules that permitted segregation of blacks and whites in schools, buses, and public places and discriminated against them in appointments, housing, and even voting rights. This movement reached its height during the 1960s. It was largely non-violent and took the form of massive demonstrations, marches, 'civil disobedience' (violating

discriminatory laws peacefully) and boycott of discriminatory services (like buses which segregated whites and blacks). One of the important actions was the year long boycott of buses by blacks in Montgomery led by Dr. Martin Luther King. This caused a huge loss to the bus company and eventually forced the court to ban segregation in buses in 1956. At the same time a powerful movement was

Fig 21.2 : Dr. Martin Lutherking-giving speech



### I Have A Dream..

going on for ending segregation in schools (black and white children had to go to different schools). On 28th August 1963, more than two lakh people marched to

Washington demanding the passage of Civil Rights Act and demanding among other things program for generation of employment, full and fair employment, decent housing, the right to vote, and adequate integrated education in which

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice.... But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination....

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character...  
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

whites and blacks could study together. This was addressed among others by Dr. King who made his historic speech, "I have a dream.." These laws were subsequently passed and after long struggle many of them got effectively implemented. This became an inspiration all over the world for leading non-violent social movements for reform and change.

As the movement grew in strength, several viewpoints emerged – many people agreed with Dr King that it was possible to achieve equality for all people through peaceful means and persuading the government to pass necessary laws. However, many others like Malcom X were of the view that blacks were a separate nation and should fight for independence from white rule. They also felt that in order to win power they will have to use all means including armed conflict.

A large section of people who actively participated in the civil rights movement were black women, who felt that their voice was not being heard even within the movement which was dominated by men. In fact no woman was allowed to speak in

Try to read this famous speech of Dr King and write an essay on the ideals he set for American society and how he planned to achieve it.



the famous Washington March. They felt that women needed to assert themselves for equality of women.

All these diverse streams too contributed in their own way in building a powerful movement for equality which shaped modern history of the USA.

- Make a table and list demands of civil rights movement and possible solutions in your opinion.
- USA claims to be a democracy, yet it kept certain groups of people segregated, till middle of last century. Discuss how the idea of democracy need to be more inclusive in our context.
- Why do we hear different voices within a movement? Can you identify differences in them ?

## Human Rights Movements in the USSR



In those days the USSR and the countries of Eastern Europe which were within the sphere of influence of the USSR had a government which did not allow free multi-party elections, free uncensored press or media, or even freedom of expression or movement for ordinary people. These governments were constantly under fear of conspiracies to destabilise them and kept a close control over all activities of people. As people grew tired of such controls many movements for human rights like freedom of expression, movement and free press took place in different parts of USSR and Eastern Europe. In countries like Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland this also took the form of demand for freedom from the control of USSR over them. Some of these movements also received support from the anti-Communist countries including the USA and UK. These movements for human rights had many shades of differences. Some of these trends called for greater freedom for common people, while others sought to dismantle the socialist system as it existed in these countries. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the famous writer and Andrei Sakharov, the nuclear scientist were important leaders of this movement. Under the influence of these and other

- Can you think of similarity or differences in the nature of political system in USA and USSR and how was their response to people's rights?

movements a new leadership emerged in the USSR under President Gorbachev who initiated a process of reform called Glasnost to bring greater freedom for the people.

## Anti-nuclear and Anti-war Movements

The 1970s and 1980s saw a new kind of movement- the movement against war and nuclear arms. The entire world was witness to the horrors of nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Despite this leading superpowers like the USA, USSR, Britain and France began building arsenals of nuclear weapons justifying it as a means of deterring the other powers from using them. Those were

the days of intensive Cold War between the USA and USSR and also America's war with Vietnam. The entire world was constantly in fear of the break of another World War. It was feared that if a war broke out and nuclear weapons were used entire mankind would be wiped out of the earth. Thousands of scientists and intellectuals from across the world campaigned for abolishing all nuclear weapons and insisted that USA and USSR come to an agreement and end the futile Arms Race.



In the Vietnam conflict it is estimated that as many as 8,00,000 to 30,00,000 Vietnamese military and civilians were killed, apart from equally large number of Cambodians and Laotians. USA did not see any civilian deaths but a large military personnel died and more were physically handicapped. Vietnam was a largely forested and poor nation in comparison with their opponents USA and France. The Vietnamese used guerrilla warfare techniques to fight the war. The USA invented and used newer arsenal like chemical weapons including napalm bombs destroying entire villages.

During the early 1970s as more and more American soldiers returned from Vietnam with serious doubts about the wisdom of bombing innocent people who in no way posed a threat to the Americans. More and more Americans were also unhappy about sending their children to war in distant Vietnam. Thus mass protests

### “We Won't Go”

America has a law which requires all able bodied citizens to enrol in the army for a short period. During the Vietnam War thousands of citizens refused to get drafted into the army to fight in Vietnam. Let us read about one such protest refusal. This is a statement that appeared in a newspaper, *Harvard Crimson*:

“We, the undersigned, as American men of draft age, may be asked by our government to participate in the war in Vietnam. We have examined the history and the nature of this war, and have reached the conclusion that our participation in it would be contrary to the dictates of our consciences. We therefore declare our determination to refuse military service (*all citizens are required to do so by law*) while the United States is fighting in Vietnam. Our intention in signing this statement is to unite with other draft-age men who share our convictions, in order to turn our personal moral rejection of this war into effective political opposition to it.”

Some thought that these people were being un-patriotic while others thought that they were justified in refusing to participate in an unjust war. Discuss in the class the two points of view and write a short note on arguments of both sides and your own viewpoint.

swept across America against the Vietnam War. This eventually forced the US government to end the war and leave Vietnam in 1975. The success of this campaign inspired peace movements across the world.

The nuclear arms race intensified after the end of Vietnam War as more and more countries competed with each other to stockpile nuclear arms. Companies which produced these arms (called the military-industrial complex) and the governments tried to create a war panic among the common people so that they support greater expenditure of tax payer's money on nuclear arms. Gradually many people especially in Europe realised that war mongering and the consequent arms race only made the world more unsafe and increased the possibility of a disastrous war for all countries, even those not directly involved in the conflict. Massive protests took place against the policies of the governments demanding that they begin negotiation with other governments to reduce nuclear arms and work towards peace.

As a result of these pressures the USA and USSR, the main competitors in the arms race, began talks to cut down their nuclear arsenal - Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) which however were unsuccessful. Finally a treaty was signed in 1991 which is called Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START). START negotiated the largest and most complex arms control treaty in history, and its final implementation in late 2001 resulted in the removal of about 80 percent of all strategic nuclear weapons then in existence. A little after the signing of the treaty the USSR was dissolved and in its place a new Russian state was formed. With this ended the long period

*Fig 21.3: a. Vietnam War protesters; b. female demonstrator offers a flower to military police on guard at the Pentagon. Discuss the ideas in these images.*



- What were the different types of responses to the weaponisation?
- If people from different countries meet each other there would be less chances of war, than the governments alone deciding the policy with each other. Would you agree with this statement? Give reasons for the answer.
- Explain how environmental issues can affect people of nations who may have no role in deciding the location of nuclear plants, polluting factories etc. How do we deal with such situations?

of Cold War and the constant threat of a catastrophic World War. This did not however mean the end of war or violence between countries as we have witnessed disastrous wars in Eastern Europe, Iraq and Afghanistan.

During the last phase of the USSR a major accident took place in its nuclear plant in Chernobyl. This caused the death of a large number of workers in Chernobyl. But more important, it contaminated the atmosphere of a very large region including many other countries of Europe. Its effects created a new awareness among the people of the world about the danger of nuclear power whether for peaceful or warlike purposes. It helped to merge anti war concerns with the concerns of environmental protection.

### **Globalisation, marginalised people and environmental movements**

Worldwide economic and political changes since 1990s, which go by the name of ‘globalisation’ or ‘neo-liberalism’ have deeply impacted the lives of the underprivileged and poor. Tribal people, poor farmers, landless workers, women, urban poor working in the unorganised sector and industrial workers have been worst hit. By and large these are also the people without access to formal education or adequate nutrition and health. As a result they had no access to new better paying jobs or to legal or other constitutional remedies.

During the last few decades tribal and marginal farmers are also being threatened by commercial farmers, mining corporations, dam projects, etc. As the large companies find rare resources in remote rural areas, like minerals, rare plants or animals and water, there has been a rapid increase in the ousting of the farming and often tribal population from their traditional areas. This resulted in dispersion of the communities into new areas and the destruction of tribal cultures. As a result they have been reduced to being the most vulnerable section of the society. Together with this, such processes of development have severely threatened the natural resource base giving rise to environmental movements that seek to combine the voice of the marginalised with the anger over the destructive and violent nature of these development forces. These movements seek a vision that is different.

## Greenpeace Movement in Europe



This movement initially started as a protest in 1971 against the American underwater nuclear tests near Alaska. Volunteers set out in a small ship to the test area to protest. This ship was named “Greenpeace” and this eventually became the name of the movement. Today it is spread over forty countries with its headquarters in Amsterdam (Holland) and has become an important international ‘non-governmental organisation’.

During the last few decades scientists discovered that pollution causes the depletion of the protective ozone layer in the atmosphere which is important to absorb harmful rays of Sun. Due to pollution the average temperature of Earth has been increasing steadily. This is causing the melting of Polar Ice Caps – the vast accumulation of water in the form of ice in the two poles. As the ice melts and joins the oceans, the water level of oceans and seas will rise causing submergence of land in the coastal areas all over the world. Countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka Mauritius, India and Indonesia where a very large number of people live along the sea coast will face severe problem of flooding and submergence. Even people living deep inside the continent will not be spared as the global warming will cause erratic rainfall (unseasonal rains, excess rains and droughts) and crop failure. In other words global climate change will affect those countries whose population particularly depends upon agriculture.

Greenpeace has taken up the impact of climate change across many countries. It aims at “ensuring the ability of the Earth to nurture life in all its diversity”. Over the years the movement has developed the idea of ‘sustainable development’, that is development which is environmentally sustainable over long time and also just for all people, both of the developed world and the undeveloped world.

- Look up the website of Greenpeace movement (<http://www.greenpeace.org/international>) to find out about the issues they have been fighting for and how the methods they have used for fighting. Find out about the debates and controversies about this movement too.

## Bhopal Gas Disaster related movements

You must have read about the great tragedy which happened



A poisonous gas leaked out of the Union Carbide factory (later this factory was purchased by Dow company). Thousands of people lost their lives and many more are still suffering from its ill effects. This was perhaps the worst industrial disaster in the world. Right from the beginning the people of Bhopal have been fighting for four main demands:

Proper medical treatment of the victims; adequate compensation for them based on international standards as the company was a multinational company; fixing criminal responsibility for the disaster on the management of the multinational company; and finally steps to prevent such disasters in the future.



Fig. 21.4 Bhopal gas tragedy being commemorated

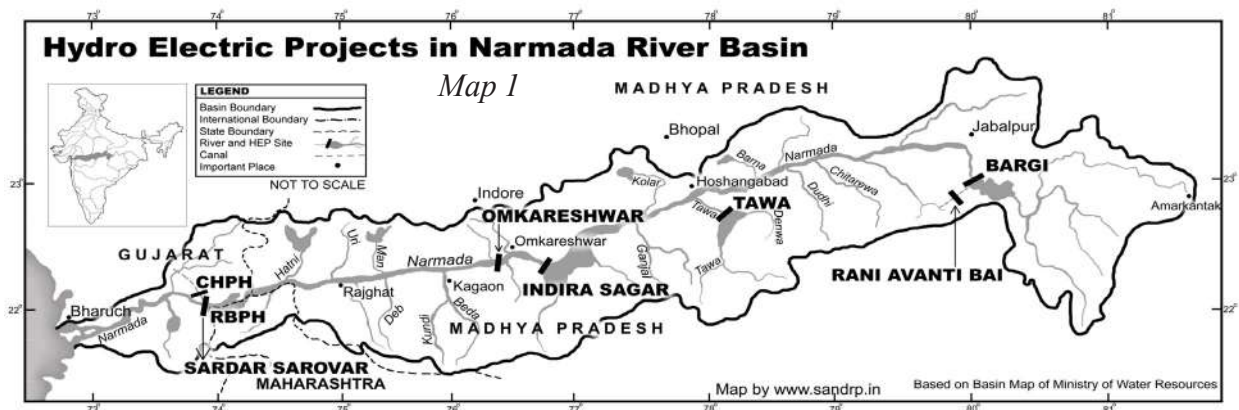
While they have succeeded to some measure, they are still a long way before they can claim to have achieved all the major demands. While enormous sums have been spent on setting up medical facilities in Bhopal, the victims are still suffering from its effects; compensation has been paid not as per international standards and that too not properly to all the affected people; the government failed to prosecute and punish the management of the company for its negligence which led to the accident. We do have better laws today, yet we still do not have a proper policy or adequate impartial inspecting mechanism which will eliminate the possibility of such disasters in the future. The protest against this has been even more complex since the company itself was based in USA. People today need to use international laws to fight against the problems that the factory workers and women who are affected by the pollution created by the company. Many people across the globe boycotted products made by the company. Even today social mobilisation continues when the Dow company sponsored Olympics in London, people across the globe signed petition against it. Multiple organisations from around the world pointed at the unethical alliance of Olympic body with Dow.

### Environmental movements

Environmental movements started in our country too in the 1970s as grass roots movements for protection of natural forests. One such movement was the Chipko Movement, which you have studied in chapter 12 .

### Movements against dams on the Narmada river

Building of large ‘multi-purpose dams’ was an integral part of India’s planned development from 1950s. Some of these included large dams like Bhakra Nangal, Hirakud, and Nagarjunasagar. In the beginning people were too awestruck by the dams, the huge amounts of water it could store, the vast tracts it could irrigate, the amount of electricity it could generate, the floods and droughts it could control or prevent. So much so that no one asked what happened to the people, trees, fields



and animals who lived in the area submerged by these dams. Thousands of trees and animals and acres of fertile field and people who had been displaced to build these dams were completely ignored. They had no place to go and had been evicted with paltry or no compensation. For most people this was a small price for the huge benefits the large dams brought to the people of the country. Soon people began to question even this, as it turned out if you actually accounted for all the expenditure and all the losses incurred in terms of forests and fields and villages, the investment in the dams did not yield adequate results. This was because the cost of the dams was huge and often it increased due to delays in construction and price rise. Secondly, they seldom irrigated the amount of land initially proposed to be irrigated or produce as much electricity as projected. This was because the actual amount of water that could be stored in the dams was usually less than what the engineers had assumed. All these questions came up when the government proposed to build a series of major and minor dams across the Narmada river in one of the most ambitious river valley projects in India's history.

People who stood to be displaced from the project, demanded a fair compensation, not just to those who owned land, but all those who lived there. They also demanded proper rehabilitation with land in return for the land lost and also afforestation to compensate for the loss of forests under the dam. Soon people realised two things: that there was actually no adequate land available to compensate for the loss and that it was really not possible to rehabilitate all the displaced people properly. Secondly people began to realise that the problem was not the question of compensation or rehabilitation but one of faulty notion of development. A development which was based on unsustainable use of natural resources, only paved the way for setting up of industries and commercial farms at the cost of farming and tribal communities. It only made unskilled manual workers out of the poor farmers and tribals without enhancing the quality of their lives in any way.

The leaders of the movement decided to oppose the very construction of the dams. In chapter 12 you read the letter by Bava Mahaliya. He was part of the Narmada Bachao Anodolan (NBA) that organised peoples movement in the Narmada Valley against the dam.

Initially the Sardar Sarovar Project was expected to be built with money borrowed from World Bank. After intense protests, mobilisation, marches, hunger fasts and an international campaign World Bank decided to withdraw its funding.



*Fig. 21.5 Protest in Narmada valley against*

Though it failed in its attempt at stopping the building of Sardar Sarovar dam, the NBA movement succeeded in forcing everyone to think about the nature of development – whether it was in the interest of the poor or of the rich and powerful. It succeeded in forcing everyone to rethink about the utility of large construction

- Is it impossible to build factories or mines or power plants without throwing out farmers or tribal people? What can be the alternatives? Discuss in your family and school on these issues.

projects that interfered with nature on such a large scale. It forced governments to consider giving adequate and respectable compensation for such ‘development induced displacement’ of people.

The NBA movement combines in itself many strands like the movement of indigenous people, movement against neo-liberal policies, struggle of farmers to hold on to their land as attempts are being made to take them over for dams, urbanisation, industries, mines and forests.

### STATE OF INDIA’S ENVIRONMENT

CSE was founded by Anil Agrawal in 1980 to study environmental and developmental issues in India and build awareness about these problems. It began with the publication of its famous series, Citizen’s Report of State of India’s Environment in 1982 and these reports have become authoritative references on various environmental issues facing the country today. Visit its website (<http://www.cseindia.org>) to know more about its work and issues studied by it.

### Movement of Women for

### Silent Valley Movement (1973-85)

When it was proposed to build a dam across two rivers flowing in the Silent Valley in Western Ghats in Kerala, many educated people realised that this would be disastrous for the rare species of animals and plants that lived in that valley. These included one of the most endangered primate species, the Lion Tailed Macaque (a kind of Monkey). Gradually, a major movement developed against the dams and in favour of saving the Silent Valley. People across the state were mobilised by the Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishath (KSSP) an organisation working for popularisation of science and learning among common people. They went to the court and appealed against clear felling of trees in the project area and Kerala High Court ordered stopping of clear felling. In view of the severe protests the government finally decided to give up the dam project and convert the Silent Valley into a National Park in 1985.



Fig. 21.6

Fig. 21.6 : The forest here did not have the crickets and therefore the forest was ‘silent’. Lion tailed macaque and many other species of insects and birds are unique to it.

## Interview with Medha Patkher

The following is an interview of Medha Patkar, one of the leaders of NBA talking about the organisation in 2010.

**Is there any point in continuing the struggle now that the Gujarat government has done exactly what it wants to?**

*“The struggle cannot be over unless the goals are attained. ....*

*“Though the government’s declared policy and plan is trumpeted to be progressive and land-based, it is obvious that it has not been able to guarantee land to those who lost their livelihoods. The environmental measures have not been complied with yet. To raise the height of the dam disregarding various conditions made in the clearances and the policy promises is unjust.*

*“The struggle will also have to continue to show to the world that whatever little was achieved by submerging the habitats of nature-based communities and incurring huge social, environmental and financial costs is not going to the really needy people of Kutch but to corporates and the big cities in Gujarat. The NBA demands a change in this pattern. The struggle against displacement, destruction and disparity is also to continue with alternative development paradigm and reconstructive work as is being carried out not only in the Narmada valley but across the country....”*



Fig 21.7

- What were the various strategies used by social movement?
- How the people in movement see the process of resettlement promises?

## social justice and human rights

We have studied in the earlier classes about the unequal treatment of women and the struggle being waged by them for equal rights and opportunities, personal safety and justice. Women have been at the forefront of many important social movements in the recent past. Here we will take up two specific examples to understand this better – the anti arrack movement of Andhra Pradesh and the movement of Manipuri women against special powers of the armed forces which had been misused against people of the North Eastern states.

### *Adavallu Ekamaite*

“This is not a story. This is the achievement of women who have studied in an evening school. Our village is Dubagunta. We are wage earners. We produce gold from earth. But all our hard-earned money is spent on toddy and arrack. When

our men folk do not have money they sell away our rice, ghee or anything that fetches them arrack [...]. They take away whatever they can lay their hands on.... Apart from drinking they abuse us, pick up fights with us, slap our children. They make our day-to-day existence miserable [...]. Then we read the story of Sitamma's in the primer. It made us think. Who is responsible for her death? We then told the sarpanch to close the arrack shop. But we could not succeed.



“So next day, hundreds of us marched out of the village and stopped a cart of toddy. We told the owner to throw away the liquor. We said all of us would contribute one rupee to compensate his loss. He was terrified. From that day no toddy has entered our village. Then, when a jeep carrying arrack arrived in the village we surrounded it and warned the owner that we would lodge a complaint with the magistrate. This sent a shiver down his spine. He closed his shop. Now we gained in confidence. We realised that this victory was possible only through education. This year no one dared to participate in the arrack auction.”

This took place in 1992 and was not an isolated incident. As the news spread women of other villages too put an end to the sale of arrack in their villages. Eventually they marched in thousands to stop the annual auction of arrack contract by the Collector of Nellore district. The Collector postponed the auction six times and eventually the auction had to be cancelled.

In other areas women led marches against liquor shops and picketed and tried to close down the shops. They tried to stop the sale of alcohol by preventing the stocking of the shops or deterring the customers from purchasing liquor. Liquor shopkeepers who refused to close their shops had to face picketing, throwing out liquor packets stored in the shops or setting the alcohol on fire. In several villages women shaved the moustaches or the heads of intractable men, or even paraded them through the village on donkeys. In addition, men often had to swear oaths in temples to stop drinking. After innumerable meetings and protests by women across the state, arrack was officially banned in October 1993 and total prohibition was imposed in 1995.

These women belonged to the poorest section of our society, from the dalit castes who were deeply tormented by the increasing addiction of their husbands and men folk to arrack. Many of these women had begun to go to literacy classes and often they would discuss this problem there. These classes gave them a place to discuss their lives and build networks of contacts. Once the movement started its experiences were quickly transmitted to women across the state through the literacy primers which were read by women in all districts of the state. Thus women from the most deprived sections were able to stand up against the most powerful and violent lobby of arrack manufacturers and sellers who not only had a lot of money and muscle power but also political power.

Today the situation is again different and the arrack shops are back in action. This only shows that only through constant vigil and action can the gains of such movements be sustained.

- Find out about more recent such struggles in West Bengal (Nandigram), Odisha (Niyamagiri) and Andhra Pradesh (Polavaram, Sompeta etc). Prepare a poster explaining the main features of the struggle in each of these cases.

## Social mobilisation on human rights



Now we will see how women of Manipur, in the North Eastern India fought against some laws which allow the armed forces to suppress people without any process of judicial review of their actions. (i.e. people cannot challenge the action of armed forces in law courts).

Few Articles from the human rights are listed below. Read this section twice. first read through the entire section and note the Human Rights that should be available to all people. Later fill the para and line section below which you think is related to the violation or are in conflict with the provisions of Human rights. (Every item may not get marked leave them as blank.)

### Fill in the Para and line after reading the next two pages:

**Article 3:** Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. Para \_\_\_\_ line \_\_\_\_

**Article 5:** No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Para \_\_\_\_ line \_\_\_\_

**Article 7:** All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination. Para \_\_\_\_ line \_\_\_\_

**Article 9:** No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile. Para \_\_\_\_ line \_\_\_\_

**Article 10:** Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his [or her] rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him [or her]. Para \_\_\_\_ line \_\_\_\_

**Article 12:** No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his [or her] privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his [or her] honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks. Para \_\_\_\_ line \_\_\_\_

**Article 13:** (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state [state here means country]. Para \_\_\_\_ line \_\_\_\_

(2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his [or her] country. Para \_\_\_\_ line \_\_\_\_

## Historical Context

Manipur today is composed of two distinctive geographical terrains: the valley and the hills. Before independence, the valley was under princely rule and the hill areas were relatively autonomous, mainly inhabited by the tribal population. In 1891 the British established their control over the region though the king continued to rule the kingdom. The kingdom of Manipur signed a merger agreement with India in 1949 and Manipur was made a part of India. This agreement was disputed by many tribes which argued that they had been autonomous and did not agree to be a part of India.

In response to those opposing the accession with India, the government has deployed the Army. One of the laws that has been imposed to maintain law and order is called the AFSPA i.e. Armed Forces Special Powers Act (1958). The Act gives to the security forces the right to arrest or shoot people simply under suspicion of being involved in anti-national activities. It is argued that provisions of the law have been abused, and often there has been torture, killing and harassment of innocent individuals including women who have been exploited and violated by security forces. As women and mothers (*Ima*), they are also worried about their sons or husband being picked up and tortured under the suspicion of being against the nation. And daughters or mothers themselves being sexually abused. Sometimes the women who are abused end up committing suicide. One of the instances that gained widespread attention was the protest against the custodial death of a 32 year old woman Thangjam Manorama.

## Meira Paibi Movement

Meira Paibi (in Meitei language) literally can be translated as ‘torch bearers’. Meira Paibi originated as a movement to prevent public disorder due to alcohol abuse in the late 1970s. But, it soon became a movement for human rights with the massive deployment of Indian armed forces to counter the armed movement for Manipuri independence in the early 1980s. It was also at a time, when the state was declared a ‘disturbed area’ and sweeping powers in the name of AFSPA were given to the Indian armed forces. This resulted in frequent military operations and human rights violations. The Meira Paibi responded instantly with protest demonstrations. The Meira Paibi took to patrolling the streets at night. Women of every *leikai* or ward of every town and village participated in the daily patrolling, bearing no weapons but only the bamboo and rag kerosene torches. Every night, in every *leikai*, at every lane junction, groups of women sit in vigil against threats and disruptions to peace in the community. In periods of relative peace, a few women would keep the vigil taking turns. But during moments of high tension, participation is more widespread. These are not activist or politically inclined women; they are ordinary women who take on themselves the traditional responsibility for the safety and well being of the community. Meira Paibi group has also been demanding that





*Fig. 21.8 :  
Meira Paibi  
Women in a  
rally*

AFSPA be revoked. Gradually, the movement against this Act has grown in strength and women have expressed their struggle in different forms from boycott of elections to sitting on relay hunger strikes. One amongst them Irom Sharmila has been on hunger strike for more than 10 years and is under house arrest.

There have been many attempts to resolve the problem. Sometimes former army officers themselves have written extensively about the conflict in the region and identified that developing better infrastructure and facilities alone can win over the peoples acceptance. The Government appointed a Supreme Court judge BP Jeevan Reddy to look into the possibilities of revoking the Act in the region. Even though the committee has submitted its report, a final solution has not yet been arrived at.

### **Some common features across social movements**

Social movements have raised diverse demands cutting across strict boundary of environment or human rights. Their arguments borrow from these different principles. You may notice that Mahaliya and Luther King too were raising elements of human rights ideals, while raising the questions of environment and equality. In some context movements resist changes that are forced upon them. Others like Martin Luther King or Meira Paibi demand for change. Social movements often distance from individual political parties, and are more united under a single cause. Its members may belong to different political parties. Often their programmes are envisaged through participatory and democratic manner. Social movements arise when people of a region or of a cause feel that their expectations have been unmet by the larger political systems that is prevalent in a country.

## Key words

Civil Rights      Civil disobedience      Segregation      Destabilise  
Antiwar      Draft age      Weaponisation      Rehabilitation  
Compensation      Anti-arrack      Democratic      Participatory



## Improve your learning

1. Here are list of items that you can use for making a table on social movements. Find out similarities and differences amongst the movements: AS<sub>3</sub>  
Main area of focus of the movement; location; main demands; modes of protest; important leaders; response from the state; possible impact on society;

2. Kannayya, Ramya and Salma have a debate. They have different expectations. Whom would you agree with and give reasons, from the context of human rights? Ramya argues it is okay to restrict the freedom of the press etc but ensure people do not live in poverty. Salma argues that food alone is not important but equally important to have freedom of press because there is no other way people would know if there is violation of dignity of people in different parts of the country. Kannayya says, how will it make a difference if press belongs to the rich and powerful people, why would they cover things that ordinary people expect. AS<sub>2</sub>

3. What are the basic feature of social movement? AS<sub>1</sub>

4. How is the role of ordinary individuals described in the above case studies? AS<sub>1</sub>

5. How are the rights of black people in USA and Meira Paibi movements similar or different? AS<sub>1</sub>

6. Democracies have been identified as most prominent political systems across the world. Do you think it has been able to take care of all expectations of people? Based on the examples sited in these chapters write a short note on 'democracy and social movements'. AS<sub>4</sub>

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7. Discuss and find out how movements mobilise people from across the globe like in the above instance of campaign to protest in the context of Bhopal gas tragedy. AS<sub>3</sub>