

Master of Social Work

Topic- Social Action

Dr. Rakesh Dwivedi

Associate Professor

Department of Social Work

University of Lucknow

Social Action

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Concept and Meaning

- Social action as a method of social work can be defined as efforts to bring about change or prevent change in current social practices or situations, through education, propaganda, persuasion, or pressure on behalf of objectives believed by the actionists to be socially desirable. Generally social action involves organised efforts to influence public opinion or official policy or executive action with the support of groups or individuals.
- Social action is a collective endeavor to bring about desirable changes in the existing structure or preventing undesirable change through a process of making people aware of the socio-political and economic realities conditioning their lives and mobilizing them to organize them as the living force so as to work for their own betterment.

Characteristic of Social Action

- ✓ Social action is concerned with change in current social practices.
- ✓ Social action involves a goal accepted as desirable and worthwhile by the social actionists.
- ✓ Social action always involves an attempt to bring about action by people other than the social actionist.
- ✓ Social action may include methods such as education, propaganda, persuasion or pressure but it does not recommend physical coercion or compulsion.
- ✓ Social action to be identified with certain method and procedures.

Definition

- **Mary Richmond (1922)** defined social action as “*mass betterment through propaganda and social legislation*”. This definition highlighted the concern of social work with the problems of large number of people and the solution of the problem through active participation. she suggested that propaganda and legislation are the appropriate strategies to bring the large participation of people.
- **Coyle. L. (1937)** stated that ‘*Social action is the attempt to change the social environment in the ways which will make life more satisfactory. It aims to affect not individuals but social institutions, laws, customs, communities.*’ this definition emphasized that in social action, the main target is not on individuals but the social environment that consists of laws, social institutions, customs, communities etc.
- **Wickendon (1956)** defined “*social action as term applied to that aspect of social welfare activity, directed towards shaping, modifying or maintaining the social institutions and policies that collectively constitute the social environment*”. This definition highlights the role of social action as an tool of the social welfare which is basically concerned with the desirable change in the society and well being of the people and environment.

Definition (contd...)

- **Walter Friedlander (1963)** defined social action as “*Social action is an individual, group or community effort within the framework of social work values, philosophy and practice that aims to achieve social progress, to modify social policies and to improve social legislation, and health and welfare activities*”.
- In his definition Friedlander highlighted that the practice of social action follows the basic values, principles and philosophy of social work. It functions within the guidelines of social work to achieve the goal of total development of individuals in the society. Modifying social policies and improving social legislations are significant aspects of this definition.
- **Surendra Singh (1986)**, an Indian author defines social action as “*a process in which conscious, systematic and organized efforts are made by some elites and/ or people themselves to bring about change in the system which is instrumental in solving problems and improving conditions which limit the social functioning of weaker and vulnerable sections. It is on the practical plane, nearer to social reform than to social revolutions, which aims at smashing the existing social structure and builds a new social order.*”
- This definition highlighted various aspects of social action such as clarification of process involved, describing goals, target groups, nature and relation of social action with social reform and ethics involved in social action.

Objectives of Social Action

The main objective of social action is the proper shaping and development of socio-cultural and economic environment in which a richer and fuller life may be possible for all the citizens. The following objectives have been identified in connection to social action.

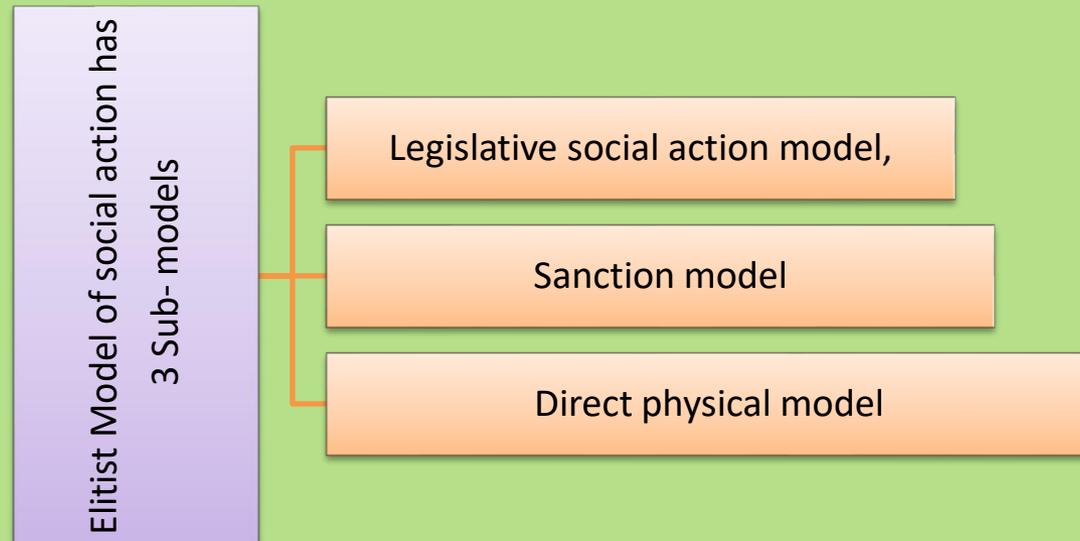
1. Prevention of unfulfilled needs
2. Solution of mass problems
3. Improvement of mass conditions
4. Influencing institutions, policies and practices
5. Introduction of new mechanisms or programmes
6. Redistribution of resources (human, material and moral)
7. Appropriate decision-making for effects of thought, action and structure
8. Social development through change.

Forms of Social Actions

Britto has identifies two types of social action-

1. Action initiated and conducted by the elites for the benefit of the masses (Elitist Model)
2. Popular Social Action

Elitist Model -In this model of social action, only elites (few people with higher status and responsible position) initiate and conduct the action or movement for the benefit of the masses. The distinct aspect of this model is that general population or the target group is not involved directly in the process but some times, some like minded people from the mass participate in this model of social action and put their effort together for bringing about suitable change in the system by influencing the it through social legislation.



Legislative Social Action Model

In this model elites try to modify the social policy by creating public opinion against the problems and bring a suitable legislation. Strategies like media advocacy, lobbying, networking, judicial advocacy etc are used in this model. For instance, initiatives for the prevention of 'Sati' Act, 1929 by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, movement for Right to Information Act, 2005 are some of the classic examples of legislative social action models in India.

Sanction Model

the elites (social activists/social workers, union leaders etc) by gaining control over some economic, social, political and religious weapon try to obtain benefits for the society. There instances when some labour officers have bargained for pay hikes, medical insurance, education facilities for children, safe drinking water etc. with the responsible management. Protests by CBOs, NGOs and other civic bodies against SEZ (Special Economic Zone) by taking the possession of their land are some of such social action models in India.

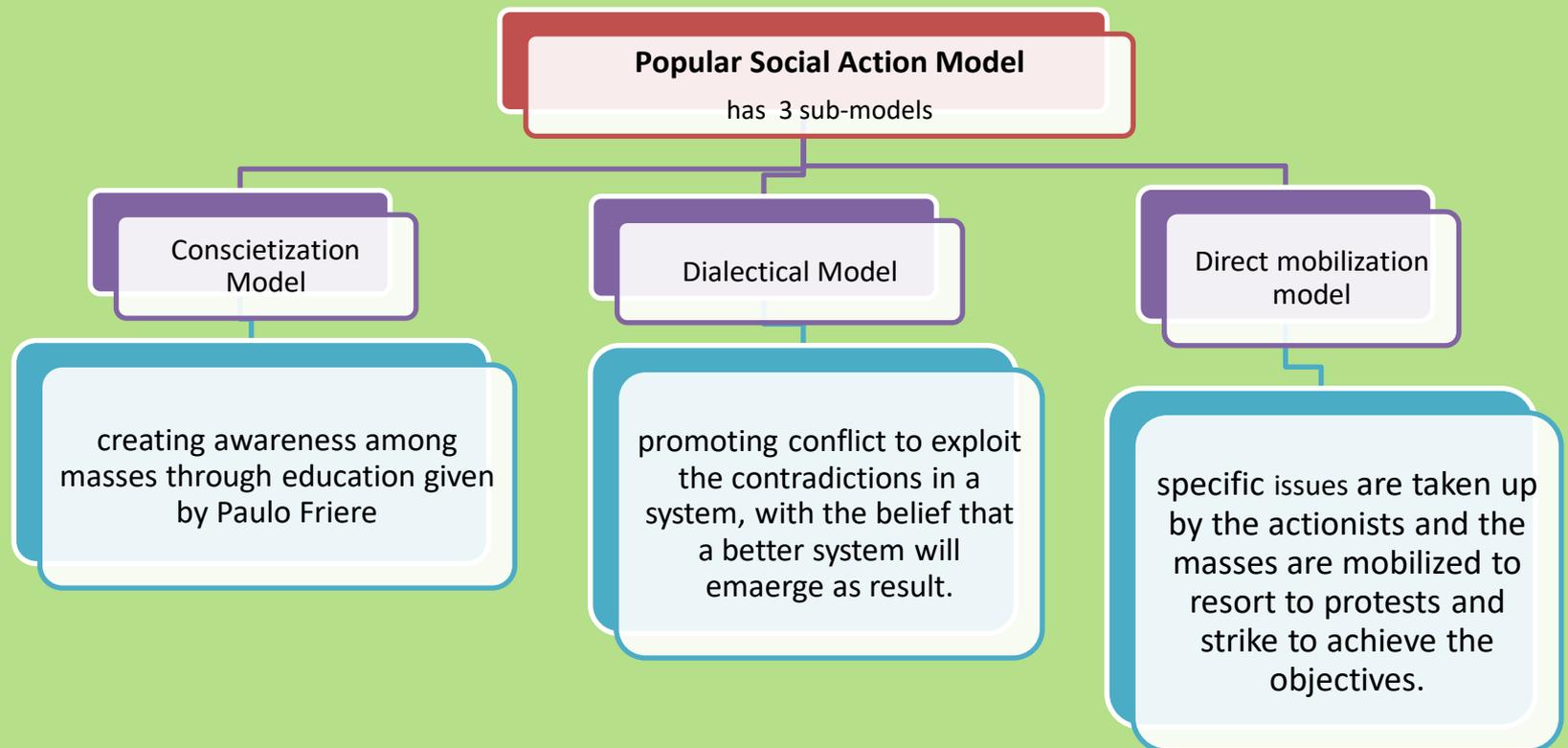
Direct Physical Model

Elites take action and punish those responsible for the cause of injustice. This model is sometimes criticized by some people on the ground that the elites under this model take law into their hands to punish the violators of law who cause suffering to the people.

2. Popular Social Action Model

In this model of social action the people who are victimized or who suffer due to the defective system, stand in the front of action and lead the movement against the unjust and defective system, structure, policies, agencies or individuals. Unlike the elitist model, the elites in this model may help the people through guidance, education, facilitation and advocacy but do not directly involve in the movement.

This model also has 3 sub-categories of its own, such as: (a) Conscientization Model, (b) Dialectical Mobilization Model and (c) Popular social Action Model.



Principles of Social Action

Britto's has described the following principles of social action which emerged out of the analysis of the methodology used by Gandhiji to mobilize the masses during the freedom movement.

- **Principle of credibility building** – it is the task of creating a public image of the leadership, the organization and participants of the movement as champions of justice, rectitude and truth. It helps on securing due recognition from the opponent the reference public, and the peripheral participants of the movement.
- **Principle of legitimation**-Legitimation is the process of convincing the reference public and the general public that the movement objectives are morally right.
- **Principle of dramatization**- dramatization is the principle of mass mobilization by which the leaders of a movement galvanize the population in to action by emotional appeal to heroism, sensational, news-management in novel procedures, pungent slogans and such other techniques.
- **Principle of multiple strategies**- the four developmental strategies given by Zeltman and Duncan are as following-
 - (a) Educational strategies (adult education, education by demonstration) (b) Persuasive strategy (c) Facilitative strategy (d) Power strategy
- **Principle of dual approach** - any activist has to build counter-system or revive some moribund system which is thought to be beneficial to the needs of the mobilized public on a self –help basis without involving opponents. Counter system must be built-up and traditional system must be transformed or humanized in any developmental options.
- **Principle of manifold programmes**- these can be classified in 3 categories-
 - (a) social programmes, (b) economic programmes, (c) political programmes

Process of Social Action

In general sense the term 'process' can be understood as a series of systematic steps undertaken to accomplish some desired and specified goal/goals. In social action process refers to the generally accepted steps or stages involved while moving towards achieving the objectives of social action.

Lee's has suggested 4 stages with nine tactics which are used by social actionists.

Stages	Tactics
Awareness building stage	Research Education
Organizing stage	Cooperation Organization
Strategy development stage	Arbitration Negotiation Mild coercion
Action stage	Violation of legal norms Joint actions

Techniques of Social Action

Social action involves variety of tactics, often a combination of them depending on the philosophy and ideological beliefs of the sponsors. Some of the techniques have been explicitly identified and are listed below:-

1. Fact finding
2. Publicity, advocacy, using both formal and non formal media.
3. Education, awareness building, concretization.
4. Mobilizing support and favorable opinion through establishing institutional system and political process.
5. Expressing anger, warmth, and hatred in dramatic and innovative ways.
6. Cooperation and collaboration.
7. Using slogans
8. Negotiation, bargaining and arbitration
9. Disruption (interrupt the progress of) and mild coercion (mild resistance, protest, marches, morcha, dharna, strikes, boycotts, fasts, gharaos etc.)
10. Strong coercive tactics (extra legal measures and direct action)

Steps of Social Action

- Identifying the problems (in this case injustice) diagnosing it, gathering information about it, about who the principle actor are what roles they play, what interest they have and what benefit they derive)
- Determining the position to be taken.
- Identifying the social action goals i.e. expected outcome.
- Mobilizing support using both non formal and formal methods and locating the network of influence and power.
- Setting up the machinery to carryout the struggle canvas action, provides leadership.
- Laying down the strategy. A well drawn out plan indicating the series of action and their networking among leaders.
- Laying down the communication channels and the decision making loci of the social action movement.
- Carrying out the action
- Reviewing the implementation of the strategy, weighing alternative approaches and working out alternative plans.
- Sustaining the pressure.

- **Siddiqui (1984)** has mentioned the stages used in the Sarvodaya strategy drawing from the Sarvodaya social action movements inspired by the Gandhian philosophy.

The stages are :

- 1) Prachar (Publicity)
- 2) Parichaya (Introduction)
- 3) Adhyayan (Survey or study)
- 4) Sahavasa (Association)
- 5) Seva (Service)
- 6) Pratikar (Resistance)
- 7) Construction Work or Community Service
- 8) Building the Climate of Change

Models of Social Action

Institutional Models (State)

The state generally takes an indirect action and is directed for the benefit of 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 or may be legalized subsequently i.e. regularization of unauthorised settlements. State action may include residual/institutional (mixed) models.

Institutional Social Model

It visualises social action by non-governmental institutions aided or unaided which initiate action directly or otherwise and in the course of time secures people's active support. In the beginning the action is initiated for the people but subsequently it progress with and through them. The trust of such action may be welfare or normative and may take place within the frame work of law.

Social Institutional Model

Here the social action may be organised by the citizens. Self-help groups, elites, the deprived, and others for their benefit but its progression and development may seek support from formal groups and instituions which may like to support its cause.

Populist/ Movemental model

It relies on popular social base and power, rejects dependency and stresses self –reliance through collective efforts, active participation, and continuing education. This is an ideal form of social action, in which participants experience thinking, deciding and working together to help themselves and in the process also strengthen their social base and power.

Gandhian Model

This model emphasizes on spirituality, purity of means and ends, non-violence as creed, austerity (limitation of wants). And moral rearmament of people.

Social Action in India

Few examples of social action in India are as following-

- Satyagraha
- The Rowlatt Act Satyagraha:
- The Salt Satyagraha
- The Nagpur Flag Satyagraha
- The Borsad (Kheda district, Gujarat) Satyagraha:
- The Vaikom Satyagraha:
- ‘Chetna’ March in Panchmahal and Sabrakantha districts of Gujarat
- Mahila Mukti Morcha – Dalli Rajhara
- Narmada Bachao Andholan
- Chipko Movement

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