



Social Movements: women's movements: A Review

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Abstract

Women's movements are planned efforts made by women's associations to bring about impartiality and freedom for women. The status of women has been the main concern of many reform movements before and after independence. It is well known that The Indian society is innumerable society with caste, religion, ethnicity and gender as some of the important dimensions influencing politics and the development of the society. It is argued by many scholars that gender has been a key issue in the history of the nation since the beginning of British colonial rule over India. Gender, and the term "women" has been used to both front and confront issues of equality in the society. The colonial rulers used gender, and they considered as vicious and barbaric patriarchal practices towards women, as a justification for the rule forced on India.

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Introduction

It is well recognized that women are victim of many domestic crime since ancient time. To tackle such situation and enhance the position of women, numerous woman movements were started. It is said that women's movements are among the most important crusade of modern social movements. Historical records indicated that since nineteenth-century, Canadian women's suffrage campaigns to recent direct actions for sustainable development in India, wherever women's movements have been established, national organizations and local grassroots groups have worked together to support women and girls. Diverse, even conflicting, compassions of women's interests rise from differences in gender, race, class, cultural, religion, and sexuality, as well as from global divisions of wealth and power. However, the rife of oppression against women has resulted in formation of international women's movements with common agendas, linked to struggles for sovereignty, democracy, and secures livelihoods around the world.

To honour woman, March 8th is celebrated around the world. It is considered as a historical day, an icon of the struggle waged against mistreatment and oppression by women all over the



world, for over a century. It is a day to express and demonstrate collective strength and to renew struggle of women for equality and justice.

Women's participation in movements has been in four major forms:

- For social, economic and political rights of specific categories of people like tribal, peasants and industrial workers.
- For improvement in conditions of work and autonomy to women.
- For equal remuneration for work.
- In general social movements on issues affecting men and children like abortions, adoption of children, sexual exploitation.

Issues Taken up by the New Women's Groups

A. Campaign against Violence against Women

The movement got momentum with the campaign against the Supreme Court of India's judgement against Mathura, a teenage tribal girl who was gang-raped by the policemen at the dead of night, in the police station in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra in 1972. After 8 years of legal battle in the Session's Court, the High Court and the Supreme Court by her sympathetic lawyer Ad. Vasudha Dhagamwar, Mathura lost everything – her status, her self-esteem and her credibility –, the Court declared that Mathura was not raped by the men in uniform but Mathura being a woman of 'an easy virtue' gave a wilful consent for sexual intercourse. Vasudha and her three colleagues in the legal profession wrote an open letter challenging the Supreme Court's verdict in an extremely poignant and logically convincing style. This letter was widely publicized in the print media.

B. Fight against Unjust Family Laws

While providing support to women facing problems concerning marriage, divorce, maintenance, alimony, property rights, custody of child/children and guardianship rights, the activists realised that the existing personal laws and most of the customary laws were discriminating against women. Hindu daughters were deprived of coparcenary rights in parental property as per the codes of Mitakshara.

Christian women could not get divorce on the ground of husband's adultery; it had to be coupled with cruelty, bestiality and sodomy. These antiquated laws were enacted in the colonial period to serve the interests of the British bureaucrats who had their legally wedded wives in England and were cohabiting with the Indian (in their language 'native') women.



Parsee daughters who married non-Parsee men lost their property rights and non-Parsee wives of Parsee husbands got only half the shares in husband's property as per the Parsee Personal Law. Shari at Law subjugated Muslim women by imposing purdah, allowing polygamy and unilateral divorce by men to his wife/wives and by depriving divorced Muslim women of maintenance rights.

C. Reproductive Rights of Women

When it comes to reproductive rights of women, most of the efforts of the women's groups in India have been directed against excesses committed in the name of family planning programmes. Now, Indian Council of Medical Research, All India Institute of Medical Sciences and Institute of Research in Reproduction (IRR) has shown readiness to discuss scientific, medico legal and operational dimensions of bio-medical researches conducted on human subjects. UNFPA (1998) and WHO have drawn guidelines about population policies that its focus shifts from targeting women for population control to women's reproductive rights. Ethical guidelines for bio-medical research are drawn. Still in the interior parts of India, poor women have been the main targets of the abusive sterilization operations and unsafe inject able and oral contraceptives. Recent researches on adolescent girls and abortion have highlighted the problem of teenage pregnancies, trafficking of young girls for sex trades and complicity of the criminal justice system.

Campaign against sex determination resulted into central legislation banning amniocentesis, chrion-villai-biopsy and sex pre-selection techniques for femicide. But, much is needed to be done to make the legislation effective in the real life. CEHAT and the Lawyers Collective have jointly supported a petition (Public interest Litigation in the Supreme Court of India) filed by Dr. Sabu George for effective implementation of the Act.

D. Anti Arrack/alcohol Movement

Since mid seventies, tribal women in different parts of country – Andra Pradesh, Manipur, Maharashtra have been fighting against alcohol/lecre sale inducing alcoholism among men resulting into devastation of families and domestic violence against women and children. In Andhra Pradesh, the anti-arrack movement was strong in 1992 to 93 and it spread into other states at different levels. More than 40,000 women uniting and blocking the arrack auction in Andhra was a historic chapter in the Indian women's movement. In Maharashtra, the elected women representatives in local self government institutions, Panchayati Raj Institutions



(PRIs) have forced the state government to declare their block/village/taluk 'alcohol free zone' if 50% of women in the area give their vote against sale and distribution of alcohol.

e. Women's Movement and Peace Initiatives

The most important contribution of the women's movement has been its commitment for peace-initiatives in the disturbed areas torn by communal conflicts, ethnic tensions and mob violence. Media publicity on this issue is extremely important so that such work can be replicated in the places where such groups don't exist. During communal riots in 1992 and 2002 in Gujarat, women's movement played pivotal role in proving support to the victims of violence and also took up campaign against xenophobia and jingoism.

Conclusion

Women's movement and the state have had areas of both collaboration and conflict. Regarding legal reforms, gender budgeting and providing institutional support to women survivors of violence, the women's movement has worked with the state (specifically the criminal justice system). Women's movement has also fought with the state with regards to discriminatory family laws and state terror is unleashed on people's movements-struggles for safe environment, water, atrocities against minorities, displacement of masses for mega projects. The slogan 'Personal is Political' popularized by the western women's liberation movement appealed to many city-based women's groups who realized how individual cases of violence against women were not merely 'personal problems', but an outcome of socio-cultural, historical, political and economic realities in which Indian women had to survive.

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