

Women's rights movement: The achievements of the last century

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Abstract

The women occupy the very prominent place in the history and continue to play very vital role in all walks of life. To be able to reach the position that they are in today there is progressive deliberation initiated at across various stages over all the matters and concerns of women. The paradigm shift in the socio-economic position is appreciable but still there is a long way to go in this regard. The present study is an exploratory study taking the women movement across issues globally and at national level. The universal issues concerning women are accounted and considered from time to time. There is a timeline of women movement duly taken care of in the present study.

Keywords: prominent, women, concerning, economic

Introduction

The set of slogans and buzzwords around the 1990s UN conferences illustrates the strategic way that women mainstreamed women's rights and gender concerns, for example, "women's rights are human rights" at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna 1994, placing women and reproductive rights and health "centre stage" at the Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, working with social movements to bring gender concerns into "human-centred development" and "fair trade" and "decent work" at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, adding the previously unspoken issues of sexual choice and violence against women to the more acceptable peace and women's political representation at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, and underlining women's key role in food security at the World Food Summit in Rome in 1996.

The global women's rights movement's attempt to bring women's multiple needs and concerns into the development discourse was translated in the development body politic as an essentially passive "productive, reproductive and sexualized female body" that was managed and understood through various mechanisms—essentially as new workers with specific health and education needs as well as needing special protection from conflict, violence or unfair work practices, and even sexual exploitation and domestic injustice.

These paradigm shifts were certainly an improvement from earlier development policy where women were more or less invisible. There was a more holistic understanding of women's lives and a recognition that data on the complexity of their lives were missing, and women needed to be given new space in development projects. As productive bodies, women were redefined as the new workforce that needed management and care.

The feminization of labour heralded them as the semi-skilled factory worker, the home worker and the informal worker whose industriousness was welcomed. In the more liberal discourse, women's rights to better pay, health and safety as well as access to better jobs and other labour markets were also underlined. "Third world women" were depicted as working double and triple working days, slaving in the home and toiling in the field as farmers or in the urban slums as the newly recruited global workforce, as well as the main carers of the environment and culture in both urban and rural areas.

There are many ways that the global women's rights movement can move forward, for example, through fluid resistance, strategic acknowledgement of its own power and awareness of what can work at what historical moment and not looking to blueprints, but advocating for and understanding change as women's rights activists within diverse global political arenas.

Fig 1: Advancement of Women's Rights in a Century

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| 1848 | Five women, including young housewife and mother Elizabeth Cady Stanton, are having tea when the conversation turns to the situation of women in America. Within a week, they organize a two-day convention in Seneca Falls, N.Y., to discuss women's rights. There, participants sign a Declaration of Sentiments, which calls for equal treatment of women and men under the law and voting rights for women. The women's rights movement has begun. |
| 1851 | Sojourner Truth, an abolitionist, women's rights activist and former slave, delivers the famous "Ain't I a Woman" speech at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention |
| 1866 | Congress passes the 14th Amendment granting all citizens the right to vote, but for the first time in the Constitution, "citizens" and "voters" are defined as "male." |
| 19th century | women held an inferior position to men in British society, both socially and legally |
| 1866 | the London Society for Women's Suffrage, presented a petition to Parliament asking for women to be granted the vote |
| 1869 | Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton form the National Woman Suffrage Association, while Lucy Stone (the first American woman to keep her maiden name after marriage) and others form the American Woman Suffrage Association |

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| by 1888 | with 1,400 women protesting against poor wages and working conditions at a factory in London’s East End |
| 1916 | Margaret Sanger opens the first birth control clinic in Brooklyn and within 10 days is arrested. She continues to fight to establish women’s right to control their own bodies and opens another clinic, with legal support, in 1923 |
| 1918 Act | A pivotal moment for women’s rights and helped lay the foundations for progress towards greater political, social and economic equality |
| 1918 | Women finally gained the vote with the act paving the way for universal suffrage ten years later and far-reaching equal rights legislation introduced |
| 1919 | The Sex Discrimination Removal Act 1919 meant women could no longer be disqualified from certain professions on the grounds of sex |
| 1920 | The 19th Amendment is ratified, giving women the right to vote. Charlestonian Anita Pollitzer was instrumental in its passage |
| 1923 | The Equal Rights Amendment, written by Alice Paul, first is presented to Congress |
| 1929 | women became ‘persons’ in their own right under Canadian law following a ruling by the Privy Council |
| 1945 | Millions of women lose their jobs when servicemen return from World War II, though surveys show 80 percent want to keep working. |
| 1968 | A strike by 187 female workers at a Ford car factory in Dagenham in 1968 is cited as being instrumental in the passing of the 1970 Equal Pay Act |
| 1975 | The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 made it illegal to discriminate against women in work, education and training. It also meant women could apply for a credit card or loan in their own name |
| 1983 | The Equal Pay (Amendment) Act 1983 allowed women to be paid the same as men for work of equal value |
| 1991 | It was not until 1991 that the House of Lords made rape in marriage a criminal offence in the UK |

Women's rights: achievement in the last 20 years- a global perspective UK

Commitments such as United Nation Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security, Millennium Development Goals 3 on gender equality, and regional frameworks like the Maputo Protocol, which have enshrined women’s rights on paper, are important steps. But what do laws and global commitments mean when a third of women globally experience violence, while women are systematically kept out of decision-making and while millions still live in poverty?

New York

Women’s activism after Beijing prompted some policy changes, including new anti-violence laws and a spate of government programmes on gender inequality. But laws without effective, equitable enforcement and government programmes without budgets don’t generate progress. To make rights real for every woman, we need to work to change social norms, economic priorities and our own hearts.

Afghanistan

For women in Afghanistan, there have been undeniable improvements since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. Women’s rights campaigners have pushed through some incredible initiatives, often against the odds. But the situation is still desperate and Afghan activists are all worried what will happen after this year – will the world lose interest in Afghanistan as international troops withdraw? The next years in Afghanistan are key to ensuring that women do not become second class citizens again, as under the Taliban.

UN

Today UN celebrate the achievements of women and girls and progress towards gender equality. UN redoubles efforts because this century’s global challenges — poverty, conflict, and climate change — cannot be overcome without women’s full and equal participation. This means ending violence against women, safeguarding human rights, and ensuring equal opportunity in education, the economy, and decision-making. Equality for women is progress for all.

Africa

In terms of gender equality and women’s rights, we have come significantly far in our awareness of the issues and visibility of women in key leadership roles – from Angela Merkel to Christine LaGarde, and with Rwanda and South Africa driving the charge for women in government. The battles remain are around deepening the gains that have been made, particularly when you look at institutions like corporate boards.

Fiji

The Beijing Declaration provided a platform that enabled multifaceted advocacy and reforms. Despite limited progress the war is far from over. Gender inequality remains a pervasive societal ill indicative of warped paradigms entrenched deep within the heart of mankind. Authentic human development is the key to changing societies. Legislation, treaties and policies cannot change the darkness in human hearts.

The Commonwealth

Commonwealth countries have made great progress in empowering women. Yet millions of women and girls still lack access to education, healthcare, justice, and economic opportunities. Sustainable development can only be achieved if gender equality and women’s rights are secured. We have a long way to go, so we must urgently tap into the capabilities and intelligence of women in getting there. To do this we must nurture women through quality education, laws and institutional frameworks that eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against girls.”

Women’s Movement in India

The status of women has remained low since time immemorial. There is no record history to explain the answer to how and why women got to receive secondary position in the society. Indian women are inheritors of a very complex pattern of social models and cultural ideals. Some of the most acrimonious and emotionally charged debates of the nineteenth century round precisely those issues which signified women's oppression and their poor position. Inevitably, the perceived indicators of women's low status like purdah, sati, female infanticide, child

marriage and enforced widowhood, - formed essential items in the agenda of attack of almost all the major reformers of the nineteenth century India, whether they belong to the Brahmo samaj of Bengal and eastern India indifferent to the fact that, the Arya samaj of north India or the Prathana samaj of Maharashtra and western India.

The problem of women received the attention of social reformers right from the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the modern times, some individuals, organized associations and journals and significantly played remarkable role in bestirring the Indian society to focus its attention on this problem and make efforts in the direction of the general emancipation of Indian women's. The aim of this chapter is to examine the status of women in society prior to the beginning of the women's movement in India and chronicle briefly their participation and role during women's movement from 1880-2000.

It also focuses on revealing the status of women in pre-colonial Indian society and pin points the fact that there was no change observed in women's lives and injustice done to them within the patriarchal society continued even during the British reign. The women's movement in India is a rich and vibrant movement which has taken different forms in the different parts of the country.

It is important to well recognize the fact that for a country like India's, change in male-female relations and the kinds of issues the women's movement is focusing on, will not come easy. For every step the movement takes forward, there will be a possible backlash, a possible regression. And it is this regression that makes space for the exception to occur, this factor that makes women who can aspire to, and attain, the highest political office in the country, and for women to continue to have to confront patriarchy within the home, in the workplace, throughout their lives.

Individual Contribution for the Resurrection of Women Issues in India Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi

Whose heroism and superb leadership laid an outstanding example for all future generations of women freedom fighters. Married to Gangadhar Rao Head of the state of Jhansi. She was not allowed to adopt a successor after his death by the British, and Jhansi was annexed via British policy of doctrine of lapse. With the outbreak of the Revolt she became determined to fight back. A figure dressed in men's clothes, led her soldiers to war against the British troops. Even her enemies admired her courage. She fought valiantly and although in a beaten state she refused to surrender and fell on the ground as a warrior should, fight the enemy to the last. Her remarkable courage always inspired many men and women in India to rise against the alien rule during the later years.

Begum Hazrat Mahal

The Begum of Oudh. She took active part in the defence of state of Lucknow against the British. Although, she was queen and used to live a life of luxury, she appeared on the battle-field herself to encourage her troops. In the early nineteenth century, women occupied a very low status in Indian society. Customs such as sati, child marriage and polygamy were widely prevalent.

The first man to speak out publicly against the injustices perpetrated on women in the mane of tradition and religion was Raja Ram Mohan Roy who, in 1818, wrote a tract condemning sati. He also attacked polygamy and spoke in

favour of the property rights for women. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar took up the cause of widows which led to the passing of the widow remarriage act of 1956. Behramji Malabari (1853-1912), a Parsi reformer from Bombay; launched An All- India Campaign to raise the age of consent for marriage from 10 years to 12 years. In later years, the age of consent of marriage act as proposed by Malabari was passed in 1891.

Swarnakumari devi, sister of Peot Rabindranath Tagore, an author in her own right and a novelist of distinction, organized the Shakti Samiti in 1882. Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, that remarkable woman from Poona, founded the Arya Samaj and went on to set up a series of woman's association in various towns of Bombay presidency. She also started the Sharda Sadan to provide employment and education to women, particularly young widows.

Ramabai Ranade established the Seva Sadan. The year 1908 saw the beginning of a Gujarati Stree Mandal in Ahmedabad and a Mahila Sewa Samaj was founded in Mysore in 1913 and in Poona in 1916. women's organization were started in madras also. Initially, these associations were confined to a locality or a city.

The credit for starting the first All-India women's organization, the Bharat Stri Mahamandal (1901) must go to Sarladevi Chaudrani, the brilliant daughter of Swarnakumari devi. But later on it was propagated only in 1917, within the Madras city by Annie Beasant, Dorothy Jinarajadasa and Margaret cousins, together with a group of Indian women. Being Conscious of their political rights and also influenced by western democratic values, all of these women worked actively to generate political consciousness among contemporary women during the early decades.

In a few reform efforts, issues of caste and class were also combined as well, for example Satyashodak Mandal was set up by Jotibha Savithribai Phule. It was meant to promote alliance between sudras and women of the upper class. They built school for lower class girls. This led to a questioning of upper-caste values based on the wisdom of the Vedas, as well as, the callous treatment of women, irrespective of caste.

The late nineteenth-century writings of women such as Muktabai and Tarabai Shinde are instances of some early feminist perspectives, appearing at the time of first attempts at reforming women's education, especially among the lower caste. (Rosalind O'hanion:1994; Susie Tharu and K. lalitha:1993) Reform movements in different regions such as the Brahmo Smaj, the Parthanan Samaj, the theosophical society supported female education and also marked a turning point for its growing acceptance and development.

Major development took place in north india when member of Arya Samaj opened the Arya Kanya Pathshala and the Kanya Mahavidyalaya in Jullunder. In Bengal, the Bramho Samaj supported female education and progressive organization for women. In the madras the theosophical society was critical of child marriage, child widowhood, and sati, as it sought to regain the greatness of the Indian past where Hindu women were said to have been highly educated and had considerable freedom. The other remarkable woman elected for the president ship of Indian National Congress was Sarojini Naidu. She became its president. Dramatic meeting with another respected leader of time, Gokhle, in 1906 was to change her life forever. His response to her fiery speech brought into her life the impact

of a visionary who saw in her oratory and brilliance a leader of the future.

The period from 1917 to 1919 was the most dynamic phase of Sarojini's career. During this time, she campaigned for the Montagu Chelmsford Reforms, the Khilafat issue, the draconian Rowlett Act and the Satyagraha. When Gandhi launched the Civil Disobedience Movement, she proved a faithful lieutenant. With great courage she quelled the rioters, sold proscribed literature, and addressed frenzied meetings on the carnage at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar. In 1930 when Mahatma Gandhi chose her to lead the Salt Satyagraha the stories of her courage became legion.

After Gandhi's arrest Sarojini took the responsibility and occupied the streets with 2000 volunteers to raid the Dahrsana Salt Works, the group was chased by police carrying rifle and lathis with steel tipped clubs. The volunteers wildly cheered when she shook off the arm of the British police officer who came to arrest her and marched proudly to the barbed wire stockade where she was interned before being imprisoned. Freedom struggle was in full force and she came under the influence of Gopalakrishna Gokhale and Gandhi. Gokhale advised her to spare all her energy and talents for nation's cause. She gave up writing poetry and fully devoted herself to emancipation of women, education, Hindu-Muslim unity etc.

She became a follower of Gandhiji and accompanied him to England. Whenever in England, she openly criticized British rule in India which caught the attention of scholars and intellectuals. Vallabhbhai Patel, a veteran of the Khedha Satyagraha, the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha, and the Borsad Punitive Tax Satyagraha, he had emerged as a leader of Gujarat who was second being to Gandhiji. His capacities as an organizer, speaker, indefatigable campaigner, inspirer of ordinary men and women were already known, but it was the women of Bardoli who gave him the title of *Sardar*. The main Satyagraha mobilization was done through extensive propaganda via meetings, speeches, pamphlets, and door to door persuasion. Special emphasis was placed on the mobilization for women and many women activists like Mithuben Petit, a Parsi lady for, Bombay, Bhaktiba, the wife of Darbar Gopaldas, Maniben Patel, the Sardar's daughter, Shardaben Shah and Sharda Mehta were recruited for the purpose.

As a result, women often outnumbered men at the meeting and stood firm in their resolution not to submit to the Government threats (Chandra Bipan 1989:207). Gandhiji called for a vigorous boycott of foreign cloth and liquor shops, and had especially asked the women to play a leading role in this movement. "To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman", he had said; and the women of India certainly demonstrated in 1930 that they were second to none in strength and tenacity of purpose. Women who had never stepped unescorted out of their homes, women who had stayed in purdah, young mothers and widows and unmarried girls, became a familiar sight as they stood from morning to night outside liquor shops and opium dens and stores selling foreign cloth, quietly but firmly persuading the customers and shopkeepers to change their ways.

Along with the women, students and youth played the most prominent part in the boycott of foreign cloth and liquor. Annie Besant, already sixty-six in 1914, had begun her political career in England as a proponent of Free Thought, Radicalism, Fabianism and Theosophy, and had come to

India in 1893 to work for the Theosophical Society. Since 1907, she had been spreading the message of Theosophy from her headquarters in Adyar, a suburb of Madras, and had gained a large number of followers among the educated members of many communities that had experienced no cultural revival of their own.

In 1914, she decided to enlarge the sphere of her activities to include the building of a movement for Home Rule on the lines of the Irish Home Rule League. For this, she realized it was necessary to get both the sanction of the Congress, as well as the active cooperation of the Extremists. She devoted her energies, therefore, to persuade the Moderate leaders to open the doors of the Congress to Tilak and his fellow-Extremists. But the annual Congress session in December 1914 proved to be disappointing. Pherozeshah Mehta and his Bombay Moderate group succeeded, by winning over Gokhale and the Bengal Moderates, in keeping out the Extremists.

Tilak and Besant thereupon decided to revive political activity on their own, while still maintaining their pressure on the Congress to re-admit the Extremist group. In early 1915, Annie Besant launched a campaign through her two papers, *New India and Commonwealth*, and organized public meetings and conference to demand that India be granted self-government on the lines of the White colonies after the War. From April 1915, her tone became more peremptory and her stance more aggressive.

Many women of the Nehru family too had joined the Civil Disobedience Movement. Kamala Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru's wife gave full support to her husband in his desire to work actively for the freedom struggle. In the Nehru hometown of Allahabad she organized processions, addressed meetings and led picketing of liquor and foreign cloth shops. She played a prominent part in organizing the No Tax Campaign in United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh).

The AIWC played an active role in initiating and campaigning for social legislation that would improve the position of women. It helped in getting the following acts passed: the sarda act 1929; the special marriage act, 1954; the Hindu marriage and divorce act, 1955; the Hindu minority and guardianship act, 1956; the Hindu adoption and maintenance act, 1956; the suppression of immoral traffic in women act, 1956.

The AIWC founded a number of pioneering institutions, many of which now function as autonomous apex bodies in their respective fields. These include: the lady Irwin college for home science, new Delhi, which is now an institution offering graduate and post-graduate courses in a variety of subjects; the Family planning centers, now the family planning association of India; save the children committee, now the Indian council of child welfare; the cancer research institute, madras; the Amrit Kaur Bal Vihar for mentally retarded children's society. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, one of the founders of the AIWC, a valiant freedom fighter dedicated to constructive work, an eminent writer and one of the most dynamic women of India, contested the election to the madras legislative assembly as an independent candidate but was defeated by a margin of 50 votes.

Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy, the first women medical graduate of madras and one of the founding members of the AIWC, was, however, nominated to the legislature by the government. The First All India Women's Conference on Educational Reform was held at Poona from 5th to

8th January, 1927. It was a historic event. It brought together women from different parts of India and from all castes and communities. The main concern of all the women who assembled there was women's education.

Women's education had been pioneered by Ramabai Saraswati, Mahadev Govind and Ramabai Ranade, Jyotiba Phule and Maharshi Karve, all of them well-known social reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The AIWC is a premier women's organization that has attracted the most talented and capable Indian women of the century, among them: Sarojini Naidu, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Rameshwari Nehru, Dhanvanthi Rama Rau, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Muthulakshmi Reddy, Charulata Mukherjee, Vidyagauri Neelkanth, Hansa Mehta, and many others. It is equipped to play a crucial role to help women attain economic self-sufficiency and fight gender inequalities.

The AIWC has a three-dimensional significance. Firstly, it symbolizes that women were entirely responsible for their own regeneration. In the nineteenth century, the movement for women's education and upliftment was initiated and led by men. In the twentieth century, as women became more educated, they came to form their own associations and occupy leadership position. The AIWC has been the premier and pioneer organization in this arena. It has been a path-breaker. Secondly, the AIWC was formed at the instance of western and western-educated women. In its early phase, it looked towards western role-models. The deliberations of the organization indicate that by now the western stereotype had been totally rejected. The leadership is fully Indian, the members are drawn from the Indian middle class, the approach to problem has an indigenous bias, and the models for ideal womenhood are drawn from great women of ancient India.

Thirdly, the organization has provided with opportunities to come out into the world outside the parameters of the home, in order to contribute something to society at large. Most of the women members are housewives and have exhibited initiative and will in carrying out their organizational activities. For providing the lead in such a crucial area of life, the AIWC must be given a place of pride in Indian history.

Women Participation in Post- Independence Era

The immediate aftermath of partition and independence saw a steadily increasing sense of betrayal on the part of workers and peasant, communists and socialists. The delays of the congress in the fulfillment of its promises of speedy and effective land redistribution infused the kisan sabhas with a new spirit of opposition at a time when the impact of the Chinese revolution was being felt by Indian communists, and there were sharecroppers, rallies, strikes and demonstrations, led by the kisan sabhas, criticizing government measures as insufficient and demanding land reforms.

Most of these agitations were suppressed by the government through the arrest of peasant leaders, but this was not possible in the case of one of the earliest and most militant sharecropper's movements, the 1948-50 telangana movement in Andhra. Under the leadership of maoist-influenced members of the CPI, some two thousand five hundred villages in telangana district were 'liberated sharecroppers' debts were cancelled, rent payments were

suspended and land redistributed. In September, 1948, Indian troops took over the state, arresting peasant leaders, and firing upon demonstrators.

The CPI was outlawed, and the movement forced underground where it took to guerilla tactics. though thousands of women had been active in the strikes and rallies, and leaders of the telangana movement were unusual for their time in the attention they paid to such women's problems as wife-beating, making it known that they would chastise offenders, the attitude towards women reminded one of benevolent paternalism, and when the movement went underground women were not allowed to join the guerillas but were expected to perform the ancillary tasks of providing shelter, acting as messengers and the like.

The Late 1960s and early 1970s saw a radicalization the Gandhian or Sarvodaya tradition of non-violent protest. The Sarvodaya response to the political and economic crisis of the period were movement like the Nav Niman in Gujarat and the Bihar Movement led by J.P Narain, Sarvodaya led and based among intellectuals the Navman activists called for accountability among the people, mainly the intelligentsia, as citizens. Many Nav Nirman went to Bihar and later joined the movement there.

The Bihar movement acknowledged the futility of a preoccupation with the politics of power alone. Much more fundamental change was needed, according to it, in order to achieve a just society. The movement called for a Total Revolution and raised among its carders and supporters a wide range of question regarding women. Issues like man – women relations, family violence, rape and unequal distribution of work and resources were debated openly, and created a widespread ferment among its women cadres.

The Bodhgaya Struggle, which Govind Kelkar and Chetna Gala document, was led by the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, a youth organization that formed the vanguard of the Bihar movement. The position it took on land rights for women during the struggle against the feudal rule of the Bodhgaya Math was a product of this ferment. The Chipko movement in the Uttarkhand Himalayas, where village women resisted commercial forest felling, dates from the early 1970s, basically the same period as the Bihar movement. Philosophically traceable to Gandhian origins as well, the movement raised crucial questions of ecological balance and developmental priorities. Chipko achieved high levels of women's participation like the Bihar movement, although its theoretical stand on the women's question appears to be different. While the Bihar movement took a stand on the equal legal rights of men and women Chipko based its campaign for women's mobilization on the latter's supposed special responsibilities for nurture related activities and generalized from this that women had a special concern for the preservation of life and ecological systems.

The movement of adivasis and growth of the Sharmik Sangathan in Maharashtra's Dhulia district is another significant pre-Emergency movement. In essence it was a movement for the restoration of the social and economic dignity of the disinherited tribal peasantry of Shahada whose lands and assets had been appropriated by settlers from outside. The tribal people worked for less than subsistence wages on lands that were formerly theirs. The frequent sexual violation of the tribal women was a symbol of the humiliation of the entire tribe. The Shranik Sangathan's militant struggles led to a change in this.

Initially the main focus in the Sangathans's work with women was on their mobilization.

Along with the attack on violators of women's dignity from outside the community-which fitted in very well with the focus of the entire organization-the presence of outside activists was responsible for the injection into the movement of issues of domestic violence, alcoholism, etc. that challenged patriarchal relations within the tribal community. And it was through the efforts of the women's front that a systematic expose of the subordinations of women in customary tribal law became available.

The Kerela Fishworkers movement

Developed out of the crisis in the traditional fisheries sector in the wake of mechanized fishing. The beginnings of this crisis, with dwindling catches and overfishing of the seas, can be traced to the mid-1960s, although the union of Federation the Kerla Swatantra Matrya thozilai-dates from the late 1970s Social activists from Church related groups were important in organizing the fisher folk. Although women in Kerala do not actually fish. They undertake the major responsibility for marketing the catch. Sensitivity to their problems was woven into the struggle from the beginning. The struggle of the Kerla fisher folk eventually merged with the struggles of fisherfolk in Goa. Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, and today is an extremely powerful voice basing itself on workers' solidarity, environmental wholeness and sound developmental planning.

As far as women specifically are concerned, the organization took up the issue of women's rights to public transport for vending fish. Within the movement to a significant debate took place -on organizational model for women's involvement. The demand that women be accorded full union membership began in the Trivandram unit where women were strongest in leadership positions, and subsequently, the issue of whether women needed a separate front for their women specific issues, in addition to the union platform, had to be argued and sorted out in the entire organization.

The experiences of the Nipani's bidi workers, Tamil Nadu construction workers, Rajanandgaon textile workers all base themselves on a basis trade union structure. Each is however unique in extending the scope of the trade union into a much wider social field. The sheer size of the women membership exerts a pressure on the union to take up trade union and social issues that focus on women. From the Nipani struggle has emerged an attack on social practices that oppress women, such as the devdasi system, while Dalli Rajhara's contribution has been to stress the specificity of the women workers' point of view, something that has enriched both the worker's struggles out of traditional trade union fields like the workplace into a whole range of social situations including health and culture.

The Tamil Nadu construction worker's union has woven sensitivity to the women's perspective in its entire working and struggle practices. The union has become a forum for the articulation of the tensions between women and men workers, their differing work conditions, as well as expectations and prospects in the industry. The Assam agitation against 'foreigners' in the early 1970s brought women out on the streets in a patriotic cause in a manner reminiscent of the nationalist movement.

Sporadic Movements

The activism of the Indian women's movement it generally seen to have reached some kind of significant point in the mid-seventies and early eighties. It is from this time that the history of the movement is said to come into a kind of new phase, a resurgence of activity after what is seen as a period of quietude. One of the first 'Cases' to come to light was the rape of poor Muslim woman, Rameeza Bee, in Hyderabad in 1978. The story goes that Rameeza Bee and her rickshaw puller husband were returning one night from a film when they were picked up by the police-as the poor and vulnerable often are in India-and accused of being criminals, prostitutes, and drug pushers and so on. In this case the couple was taken to the police station for questioning and Rameeza Bee was accused of being a prostitute. Taking this as license, inside the station the police who, shamefully, rank high among the number of rapists in India and who are popularly known as the single most organized criminal force in the country, lived up to their reputation and raped Rameeza Bee.

When her husband tried to protest, they beat him to death. One of the accusations that is often leveled against the women's movement is that it is largely middle class and urban. While there may be some truth in this statement, it is, as always, difficult to generalize. In Rameeza Bee's case for example, it was not middle class feminists who took up her cause (although they joined in later) but local citizens, particularly the poor, who marched in their thousands through the city of Hyderabad, carrying the body of her dead husband, and placed it in the verandah of the police station.

When the guilty policemen refused to emerge, the angry public cut their telephone connections, set up roadblocks so no one could escape, set fire to bicycles and other objects lying in the compound and began to stone the police station. Later this too was set on fire. Two platoons of armed police were needed to quell the crowd. In the days that followed, a string of protest actions took place all over the state of Andhra, and as many as 26 people died in the demonstrations and reprisals. Not surprisingly, for this often happens in India, the case soon moved into the political arena, with angry opposition members surrounding the Chief Minister and demanding action. In the end the government was forced to give in to pressure from women's organizations and others, and appoint an enquiry commission, and the situation was brought under control with difficulty.

By this time the only people who continued to focus on the issue as a 'women's' issue, and on the victim as someone who was central to it, were women's groups. For others, particularly for the politicians who joined in the fray, Rameeza Bee herself was of little consequence. In taking up the Rameeza Bee case, women's organizations were following a tradition established by other groups before them. As early as 1986, three organizations in Gujarat (Sahiyar, Chingari and the Lok Adhikar Sangh) had filed a joint petition in the Supreme Court demanding an enquiry into the gang rape by policemen of Guntaben, a tribal woman from Bharuch district in Gujarat. The enquiry was led by justice P.N. Bhagwati and the Enquiry Commission interviewed as many as 584 persons. In the end, nine of them were found guilty.

It was, however the Supreme Court judgment in the Mathura rape case (1980) that finally crystallized and focused the energies of women's groups all over the country. In Maharashtra, Mathura, a young woman, was raped by two policemen (although most of these early cases were cases of police rape, the police were by no means the only offenders), who were found guilty by the High Court of India. But, in a dramatic reversal of the High Court judgment, the Supreme Court acquitted them. In response, four eminent lawyers wrote an open letter to the Chief Justice of India, protesting the judgment of the Supreme Court. This letter sparked off a wave of protests and demonstrations against the Supreme Court judgment all over the country. The initiative was taken by women's groups in Mumbai (Bombay), who contacted groups elsewhere and a series of coordinated demonstrations were organized in various places (Pune, Delhi, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Ahmadabad, Nagpur).

Women's groups demanded action and accountability expressed their solidarity with the affected women, began to carry out investigations into other incidents that had so far remained out of the public eye and a whole lot of other incidents (for example in Punjab, Karnataka, Assam, West Bengal, Bihar) came to light. It became clear that the police were by no means the only criminals, but that they were joined, everywhere, by their brothers in uniform, the army, and a host of ordinary men, both rich and poor, for whom rape was the most powerful weapon to keep women in a state of subjugation. Often the woman was young, sometimes new bride or mother; she had been subjected to harassment and violence, had been the target for demands (aimed of course at her family for women rarely have any disposable income of their own and when they do, they seldom have control of it).

Interestingly, and tragically, although there were often other women in the house, and the likelihood of their working in the kitchen was strong. The only woman to suffer and die was the young bride. In most families where in most families where such accidents took place, the police were slow to seal the place, allowing the offending family ample time to destroy valuable evidence. Where investigations did take place, women were often unwilling to implicate their husband so strong was their socialization as 'good wives'.

It was rare, therefore, to get dying declaration that indicated the husband - much more common was the woman's insistence that she had taken her own life. This issue of women's consent to and acceptance of violence against themselves was one that was to trouble feminist activists even as they became increasingly convinced that the majority of these deaths were, in reality, cold blooded murders. Dowry had been legally prohibited since the sixties but continued to be part of the marriage rituals of many communities. Agitations against it began in the late seventies with much of the action being concentrated in Delhi. In the early days, two Delhi based groups, the Mahila Dakshata Samiti and Stree Sangharsh, were in the forefront of this agitation. As early as 1978 the Mahila Dakshata Samiti, whose main focus was on campaigns against price rises, published a report on dowry deaths which identified them as murders.

However, the campaign took off in a major way only with the first demonstration organized by Stree Sangharsh. This related to the death of Tarvinder Kaur, a young woman who was murdered by her in-laws because her parents, like

many others, were unable to fulfill their continuing demands for cash and goods. Stree Sangharsh's protest march through the streets of the residential area where Tarvinder had lived and died, gathered, hundreds of supporters and was widely reported in the national press. porters and was widely reported in the national press Ironically Stree Sangharsh, had itself been created following a similar death in Jangpura, that of Hardip Kaur, a friend of Tarvinder's. Subsequently, a number of other demonstrations were organized in Delhi which targeted the police, the state, the offending families and the communities who tacitly provided support to the perpetrators of violence against women.

Institutionalization of women's movements Women self-help group

Nilakantha Mahila Kosha is the name of a women self-help group from Puran Panchayat of Baliana Block. It was created, with the help of a local NGO, after the Super Cyclone, in 1999. This eighteen member group, besides undertaking micro credit enterprise, shares all their problems and try to resolve it collectively. During the critical floods from 2001 the group faced one more challenge. It fortunately could be solved with techniques and information they acquired in the trainings promoted by the *Disaster Campaign and Preparedness Programme*.

It was last year, when one of the villagers got drunk. He did not take proper care and went near the river to see the floodwater. Suddenly, he swayed and fell into the river and began to drown. The self-help group was informed in time and, with the help of the local youths, could save him. As he required some medical support, also because his wife was about to give birth, again Nilakantha Mahila Kosha came to his rescue. The self-help group gave from their savings a financial assistance to the family.

The group, after this experience, called a meeting with all the male members of the village to try to close all the liquor shops of the village. Also, the local police and the Panchayat - the village level politician - assisted them in this mission. In addition, the villagers came forward to prepare a contingency plan for the natural disaster faced by them and this women self help group took the lead in doing so. They organized male groups and started rehabilitation works of the community by repairing roads, monitored relief distribution and management of village affairs.

The All India Women's Conference (AIWC)

AIWC was founded in 1927 "to function as an organization dedicated to the upliftment and betterment of women and children". The organization continues its mission and has since diversified into various social and economic issues concerning women. In the 80th year of service to the nation, over 1, 56,000 members in more than 500 branches of AWIC across the country carry on the work zealously with selfless dedication. AIWC is recognized the world over as a premier organization working for women's development and empowerment.

AIWC Was registered in 1930 under Societies Registration Act, XXI of 1860. (No. 558 of 1930) The main objectives of the organization are:

- To work for a society based on the principle of social justice, personal integrity and equal rights and opportunities for all.
- To secure recognition of the inherent right of every human being to work and to achieve the essentials of

life, which should not be determined by accident of birth or sex but by planned social distribution.

- To support the claim of every citizen to the right to enjoy basic civil liberties.
- To stand against all separatist tendencies and to promote greater national integration and unity.
- To work actively for the general progress and welfare of women and children and to help women utilize to the fullest, the Fundamental Right conferred on them by the Constitution of India.
- To work for permanent international amity and world peace.

At and international level, AIWC has

- Consultative status with the United Nations (ECOSOC)
- Membership of UNICEF Executive committee for 10 years
- Membership of CONGO. Elected as Vice-President of CONGO for two terms.
- A national Focal Point for International Networking for Sustainable Energy (INforSE)
- Membership of the World Renewable Energy Network (WREN)
- Membership of ENERGIA International Network on Gender and Energy
- Global Village Energy Partnership
- Membership of World Water Partnership
- Affiliated member of the International Alliance for Women (IAW)
- Affiliated to the Pan Pacific South-East Asian Women's Association (PPSEAWA)
- Affiliated to NIMROO Education Centre, Japan

Kali for Women: Zubaan

In 1984, Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon founded Kali for Women, India's first feminist publishing house. Their objectives were to publish quality work, keep overheads low, and ensure that not only the content, but also the form of what they published met international standards. Within five years of its establishment, Kali had become self-sufficient. Over the years Kali has come to be seen as one of the most significant publishing houses within Indian and internationally.

Its name stands for quality, editorial attention, excellence of content, and, most importantly, for providing a platform for women's voices to be heard. Started in 1984, in a Delhi garage, Kali has been providing a viable publishing mouthpiece to Indian feminism. Both Ritu Menon (Publishing for Social Change) and Urvashi Butalia came to publishing with substantial technical training as well as a strong commitment to feminist activism. It is not surprising then that from its early days Kali's catalogue shows an interesting mix of theory and practice.

Some of Kali's biggest print runs have been activist publications which don't necessarily bring in any money, but redefine issues of women's lives in a positive way. It also has titles that are more theoretical in orientation and are targeted at academia. Whoever may be the specific audience in mind, Kali's objective is to increase the body of knowledge on women in the Third World, to give voice to such knowledge as already exists and to provide a forum for women writers. Apart from publishing English translations of significant fictional writings by women from various Indian languages, Kali also deals with issues of

representation of women in the media, their social roles under right wing Hinduism and Islam, as a workforce in agriculture, and as victims and saviours of environmental degradation. Kali's list of authors include well known writers like Radha Kumar, Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies and many others. As the definition of Feminism in the subcontinent and indeed worldwide becomes amorphous and wide ranging Kali has been able to pour its energies into each new opening with immense fluidity. Publishing a wide range of genres Kali reaches out to a readership that is not confined to a country or region. Kali for Women has now split into two independent imprints.

The Centre for Women's Development Studies

The Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS) was established on 19th April 1980, in the middle of the International Women's Decade, by a group of men and women, who were involved in the preparation of the first ever comprehensive government report on the 'Status of Women in India' entitled 'Towards Equality' (Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, (CSWI), Government of India) and who were later associated with the Women's Studies Programme of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). The Advisory Committee on Women's Studies of the ICSSR recommended the need for an autonomous institute to build on the knowledge already generated, but with a wider mandate and resources to expand its activities in research and action. The recommendation was accepted by the ICSSR, and communicated to the Women's Bureau of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Government of India. A few months later, under the leadership of late Prof. J.P. Naik, the CWDS was registered under the Societies' Registration Act, 1860 in New Delhi and started functioning since May 1980, with a small financial grant from the Vikram Sarabhai Foundation, under the Chairpersonship of Dr. Phulrenu Guha and Dr. Vina Mazumdar as the Director. In 1984-85, on the recommendation of a visiting committee appointed by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, CWDS began to receive an annual maintenance grant from the ICSSR and became recognised as one of the Research Institutes supported by ICSSR.

Established in 1987, the Women Studies and Development Center - WSDC became an integral part of the University of Delhi in 1998 and is now covered by the maintenance grant of the University. WSDC receives direct support from the University Grants Commission which requires it to act as 'nodal' agency for the colleges and for the region. The responsibilities extend to evolving projects that provide leadership in identifying key areas in women's studies research and curriculum, and in actively collaborating with organizations serving development goals for women. In believing that gender sensitization creates the necessary base for balanced perspectives on social construction, the WSDC initiates and implements appropriate research, curriculum development, teaching, advocacy and action. Using its location on campus to advantage, the WSDC programmes strive to engage the academic community in current issues relating to women from every strata of society. As part of a network, it seeks to strengthen individual and institutional efforts that enable women's empowerment.

Conclusion

The women movement definitely a very interesting part of the world history. Right from the voting to domestic violence women have voiced their concerns on various platforms initiating proper action. In India the very apparent part of the women movement is the sensitisation phenomena itself. There is an equal effort put forth from men counterpart. India is basically a patriarchy dominated society. The progress and development on formal and institutional front is something to look for. Still there is a long way to go in this regard.

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