

## Women Movements

### Introductory part

The women's movement placed the women's questions in a new perspective and working towards just order was conceptualised in radically different terms. The enormity of the discrimination women faced and their issues like denial of basic constitutional and human rights, their experience of violence and the cultural practices which their subordination was invisible, began to coalesce around feminist consciousness and this provide backdrop to the emergence of the women movements.

**Neera Desai** observes that the women movement is the organised effort to achieve a common goal of equality and liberation of women and it presupposes sensitivities to crucial issues affecting the life of women.

For a concerned action to move towards the objective, there has to be some unifying **ideological thread** for various units."

On the basis of the ideological paradigm **Gail Om veldt** classifies women's movements into two types

1. **Women's equality movements**- these movements may not directly challenge the existing economic or political or family structure, but rather aim at attaining an equal place for women in it and at abolishing the most open remnants of feudal patriarchy.
2. **Women's liberation movements**. The women's liberation movements directly challenge the sexual division of labour itself.

**Jana Everett** classifies women's movements on the basis of two different ideologies of feminism.

1. **Corporate feminism** claiming a larger role in politics for women on the grounds that they have a special contribution to make as women
2. **Liberal Feminism**, claiming that the rights of men should be extended to women on the grounds that women are equal to men and thus should have the same rights.

### **Women Movement in India Before Independence.**

Women Movement in India was started by liberals like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. British government has also brought legislations like Widow Remarriage Act, Prevention of Sati act, Sharda Act. There was growth of human Organisation in different parts of the country.

### **Issues** of women movement before independence phase

1. Women participate in large number and in various movements along with other groups but this does not amount to a women's movement.
2. A women's movement exists only when gender oppression, specific to this group are called into question but the participation of women was largely for the national freedom.
3. There was effective mobilisation. Women **lacked concrete means** for organising themselves into a unit.
4. They had no solidarity of work and interest as that of working class. They are not situated in a space that creates community feeling, instead of dispersed.

### **Achievements**

1. Gandhian movements were not directly aimed at women concerns yet They **brought consciousness** among women and **ended the stigma** with respect to the participation of women in public sphere.
2. The most prominent organisation during freedom movement was All India Women Conference setup in 1927. The achievement of the organisation was Sharda Act 1929 and Lady Harding College in Delhi.
3. Some prominent women freedom fighters who worked for women during Freedom struggle
  - **Savitri bai Phule** - **Pioneer of India's feminist movement**. She played an important and vital role in women's education movement in India.
  - **Pandita Rambai** -An Indian social reformer who **championed the cause of emancipation of women**.
  - **Sarla Devi** - An educationist and political activist, who **founded Bharat Stree Mahamandal** in Allahabad in 1910. This was the **first women's organization** in India. One of the primary goals of the organization was to **promote female education**.

### Women Movement after Independence

#### **1. Phase 1. Up till 1970's**

- a. **Aparna Mahanta** calls this years as **grey years of women movement**. She suggests that was greater activism in women movement before independence. Activism was stopped after independence. It was thought that there is no need for movement against indigenous government. Government will automatically take care of women concerns.
- b. Constitution of India is a Revolutionary document in many sense. It has given equality of status to women equal rights including Right to vote and to stand in elections.
  - i. **Article 15(3)** makes it possible for the state to create special provisions for protecting the interests of women and children.
  - ii. **Article 16** provides for equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State.
  - iii. **Article 42** directs the State to make provision for securing justice and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.
  - iv. **Article 51A (e)** enjoins upon every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

#### **2. Phase 2. 1970s and 80s- Phase of revival and activism.**

- a. UN declared **70s as a decade for women**.
  - i. It has directed the government to prepare the report on status of women. Government of India had set up a committee to enquire the status of women in India.
  - ii. The report was published with the title **Towards Equality 1974**.
  - iii. It was an eye opener as it brought shocking facts with respect to women like
    1. declining sex ratio
    2. Gender based violence,
    3. Discrimination and declining participation of women in political and economic sphere.
  - iv. It also recommended to constitute watchdog body like National Commission for Women.
- b. **It has resulted into changing the approach of government towards women**. The process changed from welfare to development.
- c. Growth of women organisations including organisation of Muslim women like Majilis, Aawaaz-e-Niswaan, organisation of dalit women like All India Dalit Women Conference.

**d. Decade 80s was high of activism- Prominent issues in 80's was**

- i. Increasing number of dowry death-
- ii. **Mathura rape case-** A case of custodial rape in India of a tribal girl.
  1. The nationwide anti-rape campaign in 1980 resulted in the emergence and proliferation of autonomous women's organisations in several cities and towns of India
- iii. **Sati at Deorala-** A case of Sati practice in post independent India. Roopkuvarba Kanwar was a Rajput woman who was burned alive at Deorala village of Sikar district in Rajasthan.
- iv. **Shah Bano judgement-** Shah Bano case, was a controversial maintenance lawsuit in India, in which the Supreme Court delivered a judgment favouring maintenance given to an aggrieved divorced Muslim woman.
- e. Approach of government also changed from development to empowerment. Since 6th five-year plan, government has introduced gender component in each plans.

**3. Phase 3 1990s.**

- a. By 1990s **new trend emerged** due to **worldwide growth of feminist movements**. The nomenclature of women organisation changed. They became more inspired by **Radical feminism** and the movement in this phase started developing link to the global feminists movements. The new names adopted were: Saheli, Vimochana, Manushi, Jagoree etc.
- b. Issues in this phase
  - i. Towards 1991 women movement started getting divided on the lines of caste and religion. Initial solidarity was lost.
  - ii. From 1990 onwards Indian politics is getting shaped more by caste and religion in that women issues also get mixed up.

**Overall assessment of women movement**

According to **Madhu Kishwar**, the only achievement of women movement has been some bizarre pieces of legislations.

According to **Neera Desai and Usha Thakkar** women movement faces following challenges

- Challenge of identity
- Women issues are not just women issues
- Division and ideological line along with caste and religion.

So far they have never presented any challenge any charter of demands.

**According to Samita Sen**

- Women movement is hugely divided on the lines of caste , religion and the solidarity and sisterhood lacks.
- There is a need of viable, feminist politics.
- They need transformative agencies going beyond class, caste and religion.

**Issue of reservation of women****Discussion on reservation before Independence**

- Views of Pandit Nehru



- He opposed reservation. He argued that it compromises merit and if introduced it cannot be rolled back.
- **Sarojini Naidu was also against reservation.** According to her, it will impact the confidence of women. Women can be elected on the basis of their merit.

### **Towards equality report 1974**

It opposed reservation in Parliament and assembly but do favoured reservation in local bodies. Its approach was reformative rather than radical women issues. It is wrong to think that men can not represent the interest of women. In India women movement was started by progressive men. Both men and women should work together for the cause.

### **Scholar's view on women reservation**

- **Ela Bhatt of SEWA.**
  - She opposes women reservation and suggest that government should focus on economic empowerment.
- **Shirin Rai – feminist scholar**
  - She also opposes reservation because it does not serve the purpose. She gives the example of Pakistan. Pakistan national assembly has a reserved seat for women but it does not mean that it has resulted into improvement in the status of women.

### **Those who support reservation of women in legislatures**

- **Feminist scholars Laura Keenan** support women reservation and she held that Women representation has been stagnant for below the proportion for most of the Years. As per the latest Election Commission of India (ECI) data: As of October 2021, Women represent 10.5% of the total members of the Parliament. Which necessitates the reservation.

### **Reservation in Panchayat**

73<sup>rd</sup> CAA introduced reservation for the women in Panchayats with the vision that political empowerment will be a means to achieve the other form of empowerment. It was provided in the background that patriarchal structure was most entrenched at village level and it needs to be fought from the root level.

The scholars who were sceptic of the empowerment

- **Sudha Pai** - She held that reservation will not lead to true empowerment of women but it will give rise to so called "Pati Panchayats". She believed that there are lack of clarity w.r.t the role of women.
  - Sudha Pai cautioned, after brief study of three villages from Meerut district in Uttar Pradesh, that female literacy, independent voting rights and change in the status in the family and society are required for women to play active role in the village politics.

### **Those who have positive view**

#### **1. Rohini Pandey**

- Reservations for women have reduced prejudice against female leaders.
- Enhanced respect for woman

#### **2. Gabrielle Kruks Wisner**

- Reservation in Panchayat has been a key for women's social mobility.

### 3. Scholars like **Esther Duflo and Raghendra Chattopadhyay**

- Districts with female sarpanch/Pradhan -significantly greater investments are made in drinking water, a priority public goods issue for women.

#### Concluding line

- Feminist Scholar **Laura Keenan** believe that if Women are not elected to the parliament it does not mean that they are not talented. Not all members present in a parliament are on the basis of merit and efficiency. Women are not able to get elected because of **the social environment**, which remains poor and hence **catalysts** like reservations are **needed**.

### Environmental Movements

Global environmental movements started in 1960s with the publication of **Rachel Carson's book "The silent spring"**. The next important event for the rise of environmental movements at international level like **Stockholm Conference, 1972** (UN Conference on Environment, 1972). The publication of the report - **"Limits to Growth" report by Club of Rome, 1972.**

GoI has been at the **forefront of Global Environmental talks**. It strongly advocated the principle of **"CBDR"** i.e., common but differentiated responsibility. It raises the voices for equity.

However, back home there is no real and substantive efforts by govt. The approach of govt is to bring certain legislation like Air Act, water act, environmental protection act, EIA, Project Tiger, Ganga Action Plan, Yamuna action plan.

#### Environmental movements in India

In the book **"This Fissured land: An ecological history of India"**, co-authored by **RC Guha and Madhav Gadgil** have argued that nature based conflicts revolving around competing claims over forests, land, fisheries have increased in frequency and intensity, thereby adding a new dimension of Indian democracy and civil society, the environmental movement also poses new ideological notions of meaning content and patterns of development in India.

#### Identification of environmental movements in India

Why there is a **problem** in identification?

1. Environmental movements in the **West** can be understood clearly. They come under the category of **new social movements**.
2. However, environmental movement in **developing** countries like India, Brazil have **overlapping** features. They have the **features of both old and new movements**
3. The environmental protests in India cannot be seen separately from the **livelihood concerns**.
  - a. Even **Chipko movement** was not about protection of forests, it was about livelihood. It was assertion by the locals over their right to use the forest wealth. Unlike western countries, environmental
4. Movements in India are led by the most marginalised sections of the society.
  - a. For example, tribal people. One of the successful example of environmental protests is the protests by DONGRIYA KONDHS the most vulnerable tribes in NIYAMGIRI HILLS in Odisha.
5. Ramachandra Guha calls the environmental movements in the western countries as **"FULL STOMACH"**, whereas in developing countries as **EMPTY STOMACH**