Indian Women’s Movement after Independence: An overview

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Abstract:
The Indian women’s movement building on the nineteenth century social reform movement progressed through the period of nationalism and freedom struggle towards the milieu of democracy which was established in India with the achievement of independence. The achievement of the constitutional guarantee of equal rights for women could not fully realize the feminist aims in India providing a new momentum to the Indian women’s movement. The new women’s movement is expressing itself in the form of new organizations and groups which are emerging, new agitations and campaigns which are taking place to fulfil the dream of women being emancipated. It is in this background that the present paper attempts to understand the various aspects of the women’s movement and track the shifts witnessed by it in the post-independent era.

Keywords: Independent India, feminist movement in India, status of women, women’s participation.

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. There is a distinction between pre-independence and post-Independence women’s movements in India. The pre-independence movements were essentially about social reforms and initiated by men. In comparison, the post-independence movement demanded gender equality, questioned gender-based division of labour and highlighted the oppressive nature of the existing patriarchal structure. In the euphoria of post-independence, it was believed that women’s status would dramatically improve along with other marginalized groups because they were now the masters of their destiny. However, when this was not achieved there was an upsurge of various movements which raised a number of issues around diverse subjects such as land rights, wages, security of employment, equality, etc. Some of the issues on which women got together were work, population policies, atroci-ties on women, including rape and liquor. The challenge of addressing inequality within women remains till this day. The women’s movement has not been able to “decommunalise” the issue. Women’s organizations and feminists did not know how to deal with the problems of women belonging to different religious groups. By the time the feminist movement stepped into the 1970s, minority identities had begun to harden. This divisive
environment affected Muslim women. The basic objective of this research article is to give an account of the development of women’s movement in the post-independence India.

Objectives:

- The study highlights the major women’s movement in India after Independence.
- To highlights the main drawbacks of women’s movement.

Methodology:

The entire research has been formulated within historical cum analytical method. The study is largely based on secondary sources. The secondary sources are collected from various books, journal and newspapers. Qualitative as well as quantitative methods were used to explain the women’s movement in India after Independence.

Women movement: post- Independence Era:

To ratify the promises made to women, the constitution of Independent India guaranteed “Equality between the sexes” and various administrative bodies were set up for the creation of opportunities for women. In the activities of feminist and women’s movement in India, woman, however started to realize that “constitutional promise of equality” did not by itself resolve the equality. Especially in a country as diverse as India, this comprises different religions and cultures. The challenge of addressing inequality within women remains till this day. Women’s organization and feminist did not know how to deal with the problems of women belonging to different religious group. By this time the women’s movement stepped into the 1970. Having been a secular movement the women’s movement found itself facing a different difficult challenging that it did not know how to handle.

On the conceptual level Indian women were in dilemma like how to assimilate Muslim women’s issues in to broader feminist issues and at the same time religion as safeguard for cultural identity. This has been most obvious in the case of SHABANU, but Shabanu case paved a new path towards women’s movement’s limitations. Getting laws favouring on concerning women like Muslim Personal Law. The 1970s also witnessed the split of the Indian Left Frond. This led to a number of doubts regarding their earlier analysis of revolution. A few stream of feminist movement also developed such as Shahada movement against the exploitation of the tribal landless labourers by nontribal land owners, it began as a folk protest and became militant with the movement of the new left party. The formation of the Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) was probably the first attempt made to form a Trade union attached to the Textual Laborers Union in Ahmedabad. It was formed at the initiative of Ela Bhatt and was an organization of women who were involved in different traders but shared a number common features like work experience, low earning, extremely poor conditions and harassment from those authority, lack of recognition of their efforts as socially use full work. SEWA aimed at improving the working conditions of women through
a process of training, technical aid, legal literacy, collective bargaining and teach value of honesty and dignity.

Anti-Price Agitation movement was another important movement as far as women’s movement is concerned. It was in Maharashtra and it was because of the direct result of drought and famine conditions that effected Maharashtra in the early 1970s. This led to sharp price rise in urban Maharashtra in 1973. The United Women’s Anti Price Front was formed to mobilize women against inflation, with in low time, its fire baled into a mass women’s movement for consumer protection and the demand was for the government to fix a minimum price and distributes essentially commodities. Huge group of women between 10000 to 20000 hold demonstration at government office. Houses of members of parliament and merchants and those who could not get out of their homes would express their support by donations and mental support. This movement spread to Gujarat where it was known as and called as Nav Nirman Movement. First of all this movement has started as students movement against spiraling costs , corruptions and black marketing , soon it became as women’s movement because of the high participations of women.

The Chipko Movement was a movement which focuses world attentions on the environmental problems of the Akaanada, catchment area in the mid- Himalayas. It was a movement of local people especially women to inform forest contractors plainly and simply why Trees should not be cut. Chipko Movement is popularly referred as women’s movement. It directly relate to Eco Feminism , chipko which means to embrace started in Tehri Grwal district of U P. This movement continued under the leadership of Sri Sundarlal Bahuguna. Its slogan is planting five F, Food, Fodder, Fuel, Fibber, Fertilizer. Chipko movement has brought to India an important contribution that it paved the way to Eco Feminism. According to Vandana Shiva women’s environmental actions in India preceded the UN Women’s Decade (1975-85) as well as Stockholm environmental conference.

The Telangana movement had the link between pre and post-independence from 1946 to 1951, usually it was considered as post-independence movement mainly because of its implication in after 1947. The participation of women in this movement was the mail link for the victory of Telangana movement especially from peasant women and middle class women also. It was one of the semi violent movement, hundreds of peasant women stood together in Pennukonda city and chased police van in a city named Appajjpet women attacked the police van with pestles and chilly power and released their activists

Srikakulam Movement, It was the first movement, an armed struggle led by the Marxist-Leninist- Communist party of India started in a district of AP. It was the struggle of Girijans for justice and for fair play. This movement brought guerrilla bands. Women under the leadership of Panchadri- Nirmala participated in guerrilla bands. Bommaraddi Snehalatha was another memorable woman who contributed with her large amount of women follower, her revolt against landlords and government shows the empowerment of women in India

One of the important mail stone for the emancipation of women empowerment is mainly because of the U N consideration against maltreatments of women, UNO declared
international women’s decade (1975-1985), this declaration gave women a new trend in their outlook, Indian women were influenced by this declaration and changed their perspective in movement. One of the important movements was Anti Rape movement: This movement happened when a new conceptualization of rape arose out of second wave Feminism. Rape was discussed as an issue of civil liberty. Anti-Rape Movement was popularized when some organization took the issue as primary concern to work out those organizations are Mahila Dakshita Samiti (MDS), Stree Sangaarsha Samiti (SSS), Socialist Women’s Group, Feminist Network Collective (FNC), Purogami Sangatana, Stree Sakti Sangatana, Pennurumi Iyyakum, and some AUTONOMEOUS Women’s Organizations they fought and conducted mass rally regarding some horrific rapes cases.

Another important women’s movement was Anti Arrack Movement: it was one of the historic and most significant movements in the decade of 1990 by women. The women’s movement against social evil, the movement was started in a small village called Dubagunta in Nellore district. The main reason for this movement was the successful literary mission of Nellore district. In Dubagunta village Rossamma was the leader who gave slogan Give up Drink and Wake up from Ignorance. They stopped Arracks (local liquor) from making it. Anti-arrack community with 24 members blocked the roads conducted darnas. Renuka Chowdary as the chairperson of Anti arrack community played a pivotal role in this movement. In 1st October 1993 arrack was prohibited because of the movement and 1st January 1995 selling liquor became offensive.

Anti-Dowry Movement: Which, emerged around 1979 continuing through till 1984. It was largely urban based yet. Nationwide in scope not just in rhetoric but also in the active participation of woman across classes in the country. In 1974 the committee on the status of women in India (CSWI) and later the parliamentary joint select committee found two things that one is female child election or identification and second is prevailing dowry. Dowry has spread to all castes, communities, religions, and regions. With dowry has been carried the caste gender ideology. Dowry has to come to encompass the entire character of gift exchange between the two groups. By 1982 women’s organization were insisting that majority of young bride death is due to the reason of dowry or suicide is because of the insisting dowry problems. Some organization like Mahila Daksataha Samiti, National federation of Indian Women, All India Democratic Women’s Association, NARI RAKSHA SAMITI, have come to oppose the system by possessing the notorious murder of Sudha Goul, in 1983 high court sentenced husband death penalty and mother in law, brother in law as life imprisonment. In 1984 government amended the dowry bill and further implementation was in 1985 October.

One of the major important movements was Dalit Women’s Movement: the Dalit of Maharashtra launched the Dalit Panthar movement in the early 1970s. Panthar discards the dominant culture and identity for the oppressed classes especially for women. The weapon for this movement was mainly from intellectual side by literature. Dalit fought against devadasi system, another incident was from Kerala under the leadership of C K Janu she fought for the justice of Wayanad adivasi people. There are some other Dalit women’s movement like Anti Untouchable movement. Harijan movement. Dalit Lebaration movement.
Dalit women participated in these Movements. There are some associations that stand for the justice of Dalit women which are Rural Community Development Association, Rural Harijan Agricultural Development Society, and association of Poor.

**Drawbacks of the Movements:**

Through the development of the post-independence Women’s movements are significant, yet it has to be said that there are many loop-holes in these movements. The main drawbacks are as follows:

1. The main drawbacks of these movements are that they are still limited mostly to the urban areas of India and their activities in the rural areas are very limited. Poor, uneducated women are hardly a part of such movements. Intellectuals like Arundhati Roy, Medhha patkar, Menca Gandhi etc. are the just main figures of the movements.
2. Through these movements have succeeded to earn some national and international attention and supports, yet the women’s movements, at most of the times they have not be able to mould the activities of the government towards women’s welfare in all the parts of India.
3. Through women living in modern India are given some facilities due to these women’s movements, yet they face many discrimination. India’s patriarchal culture has made the process of gaining land ownership rights and access to education challenging to the past two decades, there has also emerged a disturbing trend of sex-selective abortion.
4. In the west, there has been some criticism to feminist movement in India. They have been criticised for too much emphasising on women already privileged and neglecting the needs and representation of power of lower caste women. This had led to the creation of caste specific feminist organisations.
5. For the middle-class counterparts the issues that restrict their freedom like violence related to dowry, wife beating or rape, women’s movements are useless and the middle class also do not come forward voluntarily for such movements. So the Dalit women are triply exploited because of these class practices and notions.

Apart from these, there are many other problems which women movements are facing in India. These hindrances have to be removed as soon as possible and only than the true development of these women’s movements will be possible

**Conclusion:**

Women’s movement in India especially after post-Independence formed a new kind of challenging movement of social evils and problems. And fought for the social equality. When women organize or participate in any movement in India it would not come under the feminist label rather it stands as only women’s movement but outside India it usually comes under the label of feminist movement. In post independent India large number of women’s autonomous groups has sprung up challenging patriarchy and taking up a variety of issue such as violence against women, greater share for women in political decision making etc.
both at the activities and academic level. After India independent the status of women changed, altogether. Women were given nationally equal status in all respect. The subordination of yester years was removed. But in practice were remains on papers only even today.

References:


