

Impact of social movements and constitutional safeguards on women empowerment in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

Women subjected to humiliation and suppression due to cultural codes and norms of the society. The oppressed the women who are almost half of the population, women have been subjected to huge amount of discrimination and humiliation within the system of cultural clutches accentuated by the rigid religious and traditional fundamentalism. Numerous, social movements and affirmative actions of the state and international organization have been tried to emancipate the women from the clutches of prejudices. It is observed that the women subordination found to be the root of all oppression in the society as they constitute half of the population and engaging in all kind of productive activities and catering the HH activities along with other activities for which they have not received any recognition. This paper tries to highlight the contribution of social movements and constitutional protection to emancipate the women from the clutches of cultural prejudices and subordination. The outcome of the study indicated that both social movements and constitutional protection work hand to hand to expand the frontier of women development but still long way to go.

Introduction

Indian society stratified with rigid nebulous inequity constructed by the mythological customs and tradition which conceived and accentuated the complex contraction among the people, and also inflicted into all the spheres of social and economic activities of the people, there has been number of activities to reduce the inequalities thereby ensure the justifiable dignity to all the people in which It is noteworthy to commemorate contribution of social movements and constitutional protection, had been made constructive and complex struggle against the dubious perceptions of the myth of the Indian society with logical rationale. Further, the social system is the root cause of all the inequities which could be rectified through systematic alternative, while several social movements had fought for the rights of the women and also address the vulnerability of the women from the feminist perspective as well. However, the role, status and position of women have been far from static and it varied from period to period. Palaeolithic and Neolithic archaeology do not throw any light on the position of women. Icons deciphered in the Indus Valley have brought to light the worship of female deities in Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro and elsewhere, and reveal that women were treated with honour and respect. But, the suppression was the interpolation and structurally inflicted strongly eventually suppressed the women in India. This study is an modest attempt to understand the role and significance of social movements and constitutional protection in ensuring women empowerment in Tamil Nadu.

Status of women in India

Women all over the world suffer from certain infirmities and possess a status lower than that of men. In both the industrially advanced and less developed countries, women are burdened with cumulative inequalities as a result of socio – cultural and economic discriminatory practices, which until recently, have been taken for granted as though they were part of the immutable scheme of things launched by nature. The status of women in a given society cannot be assessed in isolation from social framework in which they live. Their status is closely related with social structure, religion, family and kinship, cultural norms and value systems which are important determinants of their position and behaviour pattern society as individual as well as in relation to others inside and outside the family. Religion, family and kinship, cultural norms, moral values etc. delimit the sphere of women's activities in the family and society. Religion provides ideological, moral, cultural and traditional bases for the accorded status and role of women in a society. In ancient India, women enjoyed a very high position but gradually their position degenerated into merely objects of pleasure meant to serve certain purpose. They lost their individual identity and even their basic human rights. It is high time we looked into the factors responsible for this degeneration and mended our ways so that a very vital section of the society does not stay ignored because then such a society would gradually decay after the inception of Manu, in 'Manusmriti' the ancient Hindu Code-book, the status granted to women is quite visible and she was put to the lowest rung of humanity as she was treated at par with the animals and slave by the proprietors of Hindu Dharma. Such was the placement earmarked to our mothers, sisters and even great grandmothers that humanity was ashamed of, Dr. Ambedkar had argued for individual as end itself as he was fully aware of the fact that, "The Hindu social order does not recognize the individual as a center of social purpose... For the Hindu social order is based principally on class or Varna and not on individuals

Empowerment of women and the role of social movements

Empowerment is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. Women's empowerment is a procedure in which women obtain greater segment of control over resources - material, human and intellectual like knowledge, information, philosophies and financial resources like money and access to money and control over decision-making in the home, community, society and nation, and to gain power, social movement's contribution and insights about women's subjugation and equivalent rights are more advantageous than anybody else's theory based on mere observation for the feminist movement to reinforce its strategy for approaching the systemic challenges and inconsistencies in a more pragmatic way to bring women to the mainstream. In the same line the constitutional protection has been playing essential to ensure the protection and help for women empowerment.

Women's movements are planned efforts made by women's associations to bring about impartiality and freedom for women. The gender subject has been the foundation of women's movements in India mobilizing against viciousness and discrimination, and for upgraded living conditions and their human rights, amongst other Leaders of the Brahma Samaj and the Arya Samaj were concerned with issues like sati, remarriage, divorce, female education, purdah system, polygamy, and dowry. Some researchers have examined the role of women in political independence movements at micro level.

After independence, an enthusiastic although uneven women's movement has taken shape in India. Women from different castes, classes and communities have participated in the movement along with activists drawn from a variety of political trends, parties and groups belonging to various philosophies making the movement highly heterogeneous. It is reviewed that Women's movement in India especially after post-Independence formed a new type of challenging movement of social problems and struggle for the social equality.

Social Movements: women's movements- A thematic overview

Historical records specified that since nineteenth-century, Canadian women's suffrage crusades to recent direct activities for sustainable development in India, wherever women's movements have been launched, national establishments and local grassroots groups have worked together to support women and girls. When describing the ideologies of women movements, it is indicated that within the women's movement, there have been various understandings of patriarchal oppression and its outcomes and, hence, also varied approaches to combat it. Some organizations have small intellectual clusters while there have been some that have had mass support. It is renowned in many studies that the women's movement has a long history in India. The Shakti worships go back centuries, and the concept of Shakti, the female power attitude was recognized thousands of years ago. The goals and organizations of women's movements reveal the commonalities as well as the dissimilarities among women. Another is lessening the poverty and insecurity of women and their families. In 1934, when AIWC familiarized a bill for equality in marriage, divorce, and property rights, they drew upon the nationalist rights discourse; and after independence in 1947, women were established constitutional equality. The Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), a union of women working as street vendors and rag-pickers and in home-based industries, launched the first women's bank for poor women.

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

For social, economic and political rights of precise classifications of people like tribal, peasants and industrial workers.

For development in conditions of work and independence to women.

For equal payment for work.

In general social movements on issues distressing men and children like abortions, adoption of children, sexual exploitation.

In the decades 1970s, autonomous, acquiescently feminist women's movements climbed. These groups were aggravated by the dismissals of cases of girls raped by police and by religiously authorized desecrations of women's human rights. Their campaigns refocused on violence against women, dowry deaths (the murder of brides for their dowries), sex-selective abortions, and sati. The accomplishment of women's movement establishments has met with an antifeminist consequence, which calls upon familial, communal, and religious characteristics to try to push back women's gains. Since poverty and insecurity elevated the flame of reactionary fears, the feminist tactic of stimulating grassroots-based sustainable development is a double-edged one. It addressed both the economic independence of women and the long-term security and well-being of the whole community.

Social science texts on numerous aspects of gender has augmented significantly during the 1980s and 1990s. Many monographs and essays utilize the term 'movement' in a broader sense in their titles confining with women writings, discourse, issues affecting women's position in socio-economic spheres, rather than confining themselves to mobilization and collective action by women. In the period of globalization, 'women's confrontation to male domination' was the product of western education. British, women took the initiative in establishing women's establishments and defining their objectives.

Traditional idioms and symbols are also imaginatively utilized to liberate women from subservient positions in the social system. In that context, there is a debate on Gandhi's role during the freedom struggle to bring women into the political domain. Vina Mazurndar (1976), Devaki Jain (1986) and others recognize Gandhi as a great liberator who embraced a revolutionary approach to enhance the status of women. Malavika Karlekar discussed that Gandhi advanced the 'tradition' of a new femininity. Thus, the Gandhian woman was to use her traditional qualities to build a new positive image of action, resistance and change.

Women are systematized and mobilized to defend and propagate traditional institutions with patriarchal authoritarian arrangements and value systems. Gender power cultivates from a sense of solidarity to being a force for itself only through interference, contestation, and an exercise of and struggle over choices. Self Help Group foundation is sincere effort to empower the poor women to participate in the procedure of development. Thus, the role played by Self Help Groups in the field of empowering women predominantly in the rural areas is being recognized. The Self Help Group system has proven to be very appropriate and effective in offering women the possibility to break gradually away from exploitation and isolation.

Constitutional protection to Women

While framing the Constitution of India, it encompassed the very important characteristic of equality of men and women in all provinces of life.

Article 14 of the Constitution of India states that, "The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India".

Article 15 states that "The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, sex, place of birth or any of them." Article 15(3) states that "Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children".

Article 16 states that "There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State".

Impact of international women organization and indigenous social movements

The United Nations has vigorous role in making women's arrangements international and in defining women's rights as human rights. Women have utilized the prospects provided by the four U.N. World Conferences on Women, the official ones and the alternative NGO forums, as arenas in which they could set goals, plan, network, and stimulate one another to endure their work. They have apprehended upon the various U.N. accords, especially CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of

Discrimination against Women), as bases for challenging national obstacles. Women have launched regional networks, such as Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF) to implement U.N. policies and other regional human rights charters, including the African Charter for Human and People's Rights. In these efforts the Centre for Women's Global Leadership, directed by Charlotte Bunch, acted as a coordination centre for international women's human rights campaigns. Along with the international organizations other national social movements also contributed enormously such as Bharat Mahila Parishad (1904), Bharat Stri Mahamandal (1909), Women's Indian Association (1917), National Council of Women in India (1925), All India Women's Conference (1927), Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust

These have concentrated on sex trafficking, issues of health and reproductive rights, female circumcision and female genital mutilation, and violence against women. Regional meetings, such as the biannual Encuentros held in various Latin American cities to describe the subjects of Latin American women's movements, have been a source of encouragement and strength for various feminist leaders. Feminism took root with the aim of instituting social, political and economic impartiality between men and women. Based on how one challenges the problem of gender equality, feminism took various forms such as, Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, Marxist or Socialist Feminism and Cultural Feminism. Propagating various revolutionary thoughts to annihilate male chauvinism by identifying the root cause for various forms of gender discrimination in society is the core ideology of radical feminism. Radical feminists also believe that patriarchy cannot be destroyed by just passing new laws or amending the existing ones.

Periyar, a Tamilnadu based social reformist, persistently struggled for the progress of women and questioned all forms of gender inequality widespread in the society which vanquished women in the name of religion, culture, tradition etc. In a society where gender dissimilarity is deeply ingrained in the minds of the people, it is to Periyar's credit that as early as 1925 he originated the Self-respect movement with women liberation as one of the imperative goals. A large number of women took active part in the movement's undertakings in the form of public speaking, organizing protests, writing etc. Periyar tirelessly proliferated the requirement for women education and 50% reservation for women in all sectors. He stood as an innovator in insisting property rights for women. He published many articles about birth control as early as 1930 in 'KudiArasu', a weekly published by him. He took efforts for the remarriage of widows witnessing their plight. None of the leaders in India took feminism to this extent at that time. And obviously, that's the reason behind the title 'Periyar' conferred to E.V.Ramasamy. Yes, the title 'Periyar' was conferred to him in a women's conference held at Chennai in 1938 appreciating his tireless efforts for women liberation. Periyar's choice of feminism has a lot of similarities to radical feminism and to that of many western Feminists. This article primarily focuses in comparing their radical thoughts with those of Periyar. Both, international initiatives and the indigenous radical movements have ideologically inclined to a feminist perspective and replicated within the cultural domain according to the proximity of the society. Paradox to the international organizations the radical movements of religious institutes and other radical movements have more intensively percolated into institutional transformation which eventually enhanced the empowerment of women. These movements have encouraged women education and which ultimately endure the social transformation in Tamil Nadu.

Conclusion

Ideologically, cultural imperialism has introduced the notion of female inferiority which had no part in Indian culture, where female power and its containment were stressed. Although females were segregated in the upper castes into the domestic sphere, this separation did not imply an inferior evaluation of the domestic, since that arena was crucial to the maintenance of caste purity. The inferiority notion adds a derogatory component to the gender ideology, serving to worsen women's position. It also makes for a degraded position for women abroad when added to the imperialist ideology of Western racial superiority; for, the context of imperialism creates a notion not only of women's inferiority to men, but also of Indian women's inferiority to Western women. It can be believed that Indian women's movements are operated for some major objectives namely, liberation or uplift of women, i.e., reforming social practices so as to enable women to play a more important and constructive role in society; and equal rights for men and women, i.e., extension of civil rights enjoyed by men in the political, economic and familial spheres to women also. On the whole, social movements need not to be viewed isolated from the development dialectics as it is integral part of the development process and enhanced the dignity of women and also recognized their contribution. But, still there is a strong need to enhance the activities of social movements to preserve the women rights in the changing context.

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