UNIT 8 : WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN THE POST-COLONIAL PERIOD

UNIT STRUCTURE

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8.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to –

- know about teleangana movement
- know about anti-arrack movement
- know about chipko movement
- understand the contribution of women in India towards the movements.

8.2 INTRODUCTION

The period after India's independence is called post-colonial period. Immediately after independence, India had to deal with a variety of problems. Years of colonial domination had destroyed our indigenous crafts and depleted our natural resources. Industrialisation, changing technologies illiteracy, lack of mobility all resulted in the inability of women to cope with the new order.

During this period the social reformists tried to change the Indian society by introducing constitutional and legal provisions and protecting the

society from discrimination and by providing equality to all the citizens irrespective of caste, creed, race, religion and sex. A few of the prominent movements in the post - independence period are: Telangana Movement; Chipko Movement; Anti Arrack Movement. In this unit we will discuss about these movements.

8.3 TELANGANA MOVEMENT

The Telangana Movement began in 1946 and continued till 1951. It is one of the two major post-war peasant struggles in India. The Telangana Movement (1946-51) was a protest of the people who wanted both food and freedom from the oppressive regime of the Nizam, the Patils and the Jagirdars in Hyderabad State. The peasants on the Nizam's personal estate were bonded to the ruler. Under Jagirdari system various illegal taxes and forced labour were extracted from peasants by the landlords. Apart from this there were the Deshmukhs and Despandes (principal revenue officers of a district who became land owners overtime) or tax collectors of the Nizam who grabbed thousands of acres of land and made it their own property. Peasants thus became tenants at will.One common social phenomenon was the Vetti system of forced labour and exactions imposed on all peasant sections in varying degrees. Each family had to send someone to collect wood for fuel, carry post to other villages, carry supplies etc. Foot wear, agricultural implements, pots or cloth had to be supplied free to landlords. Another system that prevailed was keeping of peasant girls as slaves in the landlord's house. When landlord's daughters were married slaves were often sent with them to serve as concubines.When the exactions of the landlords reached the point of evicting peasants from their land, the peasants began to resist. Sporadic struggles were launched in 1946 against the Deshmukhs of Visunur, Suryapet, Babasahebpet and Kalluru. Large number of women who were desperate because of extreme poverty, slavery and sexual exploitation by the feudal lords fought courageously in this movement. In order to mobilise and develop political acumen among women, the communist party formed a women's organisation which published a woman's Journal, Andhra Vanitha. Through

this they campaigned against child marriage, widow remarriage, increased wages etc.Crucially affected by the oppression of landlords and money lenders, women who were a large section of the agricultural labour and tobacco leaf pickers became militant in the struggle for land, better wages, fair rent, reasonable interest on cash and grain loans. Among the bonded class, rape, sent as concubines to landlords' married daughter's house etc. were prevalent. The oppression of the upper class women was kept under wraps as the violence they faced was not visible and structural purdah was strictly observed both by high caste Hindu and Muslim women. Child marriage and early widowhood were common. Education for women was unheard of. In Telangana the cultural dominance of Muslim feudal rule kept women out of the mainstream for long. Andhra Maha Sabha, which sprung up to assert the cultural identity of the people, added women's education to their agenda of constitutional reform and civil liberties. Thus many women, who were drawn into the cultural movements, drew closer to the communist party which was working through the Andhra Maha Sabha. When the Andhra Maha Sabha added basic agrarian reforms to its programme of action these women also plunged into the struggle. Women from all classes participated in the movement with energy and commitment where both the urban middle class as well as the peasant sections of the population, drew their support slowly but surely into the movement. The communist party which took up issues of social reforms for women like widow remarriage, prohibition of child marriage, education for women and opportunities, also began to identify women of ability to make the movement stronger. Some of the women who took active part in the movement were Dubala Salamma, Ch. Kamalamma, Regulla Achamma, Chityala Ailamma, Pesaru Satbamma, Malla Swarajyam, Dayani Kausalya, Pramila Tail, Chakilam Lalithamma, Bullemma, Narasamma, Vajramma, Saidamma, Suganamma, etc. The Communist party in Andhra served as a rear base for the Telangana struggle, arranging for relief and supplies. The entry of the Indian Army into Hyderabad in September 1948 brought about the surrender of the Nizam and the disbanding of the Razakars. The force of the Army was then turned on the peasants, the communist party was banned and repression increased. The

rich peasantry withdrew its support once the Nizam was gone and the squads had to move into the forests. Finally the struggle was withdrawn in 1951. Some changes took place after the withdrawal. Forced labour was abolished, village became active and people resisted the return of the old Jagirdari system. The demand for division along linguistic zones to facilitate all round political, social and cultural development of the people was also subsequently pushed forward. More important was the fact that it had set a revolutionary tradition among Telugu people.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

QA) i) In which year the Telangana movement started?

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QA) ii) Name three women who were associated with the Telangana movement.

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8.4 CHIPKO MOVEMENT

Chipko Movement was born in a small hilly village, Advani in Tehri Garhwal district of Uttar Pradesh. The illiterate adivasi women led this movement in December 1972. It challenged the old belief that forests meant for timber and emphasized its roles in making soil, water and pure air as the basis of human life. This philosophy popularised the movement in many countries. The women symbolically tied sacred threads around the trees, faced police firing in February 1978 and later courted arrest. This movement continued under the leadership of Sri Sunderlal Bahuguna in various villages. The movements emphasized five F's- food, fodder, fuel, fibre and fertiliser to make communities self-sufficient in all their basic needs. The Chipko movement is inimical to gender in its theoretical underpinnings as well as the political and economic ones. Women and children gather firewood for

domestic consumption. They rely on the forestry for combustible crop residues such as rice straw. This, however, is considered inferior to fuel-wood. Therefore, forestry activities that increase the availability of fuel-wood and development projects that promote improved stoves both release women's labour from fuel collection and permit its use in other productive activities, and improve the agricultural environment by permitting crop residues to be better used for enriching depleted soil. The movement points out the link between women's burden as food providers and gatherers and their militancy in protecting natural resources from violent devastation.The women involved in the movement believed that the trees were alive and could breathe like them. Thus trees should be respected. Besides supporting agriculture and animal husbandry, the forests grew medicinal herbs used for its healing powers. The hill women used fruit, vegetables or roots from it in times of scarcity. This dependency on forest resources was institutionalised through some social and cultural mechanisms, like religion, folklore and oral tradition. Many wooded areas bore marks of the hill folk's instinct for the plantation and preservation of the forest.The Chipko movement against tree felling is a phenomenon no less. On April 1974, the women whose annual per capita income was Rs.129 rose against tree - felling. It was nationally and internationally discussed as peoples' ecological movement for the protection of the natural environment. Men migrated to the plains and women were left to cope with an impoverished existence and to provide for the old and the children. Women repeatedly challenged administrators and politicians. In the course of this movement, Garhwal women successfully undertook leadership roles and questioned the right of the men to decide the fate of the forests or to enter into contracts without consulting them, who were the worst affected. The forests were these women's home, and hence they would not let it be cut down. The police force used all repressive and terrorising methods to retreat the non-violent strength of the women. One of the women, Gaura Devi led 27 village women to prevent the contractors and forest department personnel, about 60 men in all, from entering the Reni forest to cut 2,415 trees. While the women blocked the narrow passage leading to the forest, the men used all sorts of

threats and also misbehaved with the women. But the women bravely refused to budge.

8.5 ANTI-ARRACK MOVEMENT

The anti-arrack movement of women in Andhra Pradesh was one of most historic and significant movements of the 1990s. If was waged by the women of Andhra Pradesh against the social evil of alcohol drinking. Women have played a historic role in bringing about a ban on consumption and sale of distilled liquor in Andhra Pradesh. The movement indeed was not just for elimination of liquor but for the protection and survival of their lives and culture. The rural women in the villages raised their voices against the degeneration of the progress of their families through the damage caused by their men to their children and themselves. The movement was started in a small village, Dubagunta, in Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh. The main reason for the movement was said to be the successful literacy mission that has been going in Nellore district. The National literacy Mission (NLM) was officially launched in Nellore District from 2nd January 1990 and was implemented from January 1991. This program was implemented in a very innovative way with recognition of development as an instrument of change and empowerment of women. Hence a campaign approach was adopted to spread the message of literacy. Primers were written, popular performances used and a center for people's awareness created. Besides this, cultural committees were organised to convey the meaning and need for literacy in the form of songs, dance-dramas and street plays. (Pande, 2002) Sharing of problems through such mediums helped women to create a close bonding. They decided to fight the vice of drinking. The women reasoned that if the arrack shops were closed the men would not get liquor and hence would not drink. These women then marched together the next day and were able to get the arrack shop closed in their village. The Dubagunta episode was soon quoted in another literacy primer, under the title, Adavallu Ekamaithe, (If Women Unite). The lesson had an electrifying impact on women in other villages who felt that they could do the same. In many villages women's committees were formed. Their fight turned into a larger issue

involving contractors, the excise department and the state itself. The women wanted to know why their village did not have drinking water, schools for children or proper wages but plenty of arrack shops (ibid). Anti-arrack movement though started as a spontaneous outburst of lower class and lower caste women it soon became a rage through classes and castes against local arrack shops, excise officials, liquor contractors and all the machineries of state involved in the trade. Apart from these, the women resisted pressure tactics and attacks from those whom they were fighting. The inspirational guidance extended by the veteran freedom fighter Mr. Vavilala Gopala Krishnaiah, added momentum to the movement organised and spread to all villages in the district. Soon all the arrack supply sources were blocked. There were spontaneous and simultaneous demonstrations in all the areas against the evils of arrack consumption. The women's struggle against the sale of arrack in Andhra Pradesh had 20 non- political organisations that fought for the scraping of auctions and bring about a complete ban on its manufacture. Through this movement, women have definitely emerged out winners because they were well aware of their strengths and ability to bring about change in society. Most importantly, the anti arrack agitation is a very good example of the articulation of a family violence in public. It showed a feminist way of looking at issues, especially a private issue like family violence and aligning it to a larger issue of state and society. It questioned the notion about domestic violence being private and women not being able to do anything about it. This movement gave tremendous self-confidence and sense of power to women, who realised their strength and used it to their benefit.

8.6 WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN INDIA SINCE THE 1970S

In the post-Independence period during the first few decades, the major concern was for overall economic growth. This was immediately followed by another decade, which witnessed an increased concern for equity and poverty alleviation. Gender issues were subsumed in poverty related concerns and there were no specific programs which aimed at women. Women during this period were involved in such movements like

the law and famine relief movement but did not start to pick up issues involving their oppression until the 1970s. NGOs and other such organisations from the 70s started emphasising on women's development and provided women avenues of collectively voicing their concerns. These grass root organisations have questioned the welfare approach to women and incorporated an empowerment participatory approach. While questions about the success of these organisations are often raised, it is often seen that women exposed to some amount of mobilisation show great potentialities, receptiveness and defining capacities (Banerjee, 1992).

The myth of equality for women was shattered by the path breaking, *Towards Equality Report* of 1974. It focused attention on the fact that despite many progressive social legislations and constitutional guarantees, women's status had indeed not improved much. Women continued to have an inferior status in many areas like political, economic and social. The report pointed out to a sad fact that society had not yet succeeded in framing the required norms and institutions to enable women to fulfilled their multiple roles. The increasing incidence of practice like dowry indicated further lowering of the status of women. The report also pointed out that the concern for women and their problems which received an impetus during the freedom movement had suffered a decline in the last two decades. In the post-independence period, the women's movement has concerned itself with a large number of issues such as dowry, women's work, price rise, land rights, political participation of women, Dalit marginalised women's right, growing fundamentalism, women's representation in the media etc. It has also been able to draw a large number of women around three major issues: girl child, gender violence and globalisation.The important characteristics of the 3rd phase of women's movement i.e. from post-independence era to 1985 are as follows: till the 1970s a kind of passivity or accommodation due to the socio-economic circumstances of free India influenced the women's movement. The economic crisis of 1960s created an atmosphere in which issues concerning women are more and in which women started taking place (1975-1985- International Women's Decade) saw the emergence of autonomous women's movement in which autonomous women's groups

and organisations started fighting for liberation. Ideals of equal status and important provisions for the welfare of women were incorporated into the Indian constitution, while the pre-independent legislative acts continued to be in force. The constitution guaranteed equal rights to both the sexes. Article 15 and Article 16 (2) of the constitution forbids discrimination and accepts all as equal in the eyes of the law (Article 14). In the early 1950s a series of legislations such as the Hindu Marriage Act, Hindu Succession Act, Dowry Prohibition Act and Equal Remuneration Act were passed. The emergence of independent India as a welfare state also affected the contours of Indian women's movement. The Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) promotes welfare and development services for women, children and under privileged sections of the society. It has a nationwide programme for grants-in-aid for welfare activities with a special emphasis on women's welfare. The period from the late 1960s has been marked by an economic crisis and stagnation, rising prices, increasing landlessness and generalised discontent both in the rural and urban areas. The left parties took interest in the economic crisis and started organising movements. Through women's issues were not taken up, women were mobilised in large number and they participated in the general struggle of the rural poor, tribals and industrial working class. Women's organisations such as Shramik Mahila Sangathana (the working women's organisation) took up the issue of rising prices of essential goods, adulteration etc. This saw its culmination in the anti-price movement of 1973 as a united front organisation of women belonging to political parties such as CPI (M), Socialist Party, Congress and even non-political women. The political parties mobilised women to achieve their own political gains. This resulted in the establishment of National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) by the Communist Party of India. The economic hardships of the rural masses also drew the attention of some political parties. While pressing for better working conditions for peasant women, issues like wife beating, alcoholism, dowry and sexual harassment from the upper castes were also given attention. Thus in the early 1970s while elite women's organisations were conducting cultural activities and beauty shows, the poor women were getting entrenched into serious movements. The decade from 1975 to 1985

saw the emergence of autonomous women's movement. The year 1975 was declared as the International Women's Year (IWY) which was later extended to a decade. The government appointed the Committee on the Status of Indian Women (CSIW) in 1971 to examine the rights and status of Indian women and to suggest certain measures to enable women to play their proper role in the building up of the nation. Paying unequal wages to women for equal work is a part of the general discrimination against women in the work place especially in the agriculture, plantations, mines and other unorganised industries. Working women's hostels, legal facilities and trade union rights were not available to women. Mortality rate among women was higher than that of men due to malnutrition. Violence against women appears in the form of dowry deaths, wife battering, mass rape during caste and communal riots, gang rape, sexual harassment of women and stereotyped representation of women in media. Along with these, poverty and deprivation affect the conditions of dalit and tribal women, many of whom are forced to prostitution. Autonomous women's movements emerged during the international women's decade which provided an opportunity towards attention on women's issues. In 1975, March 8th was celebrated as international women's day for the first time. Important features of the women's autonomous movement are that women organised themselves and led the movements and fought against oppression, exploitation, injustice and discrimination. The women's organisations that emerged during the autonomous movement period could be divided into six categories:

- Autonomous groups whose main propaganda is agitation and to raise consciousness.
- Grass root or mass based organisations like trade unions, agricultural labourers' organisations, democratic groups, tribal organisations etc. in which women's issues like wife beating, sexual harassment by the landlords, alcoholism of men have been taken up.
- Groups that concentrate on providing services, shelter homes etc. to needy women.
- Professional women's organisations such as doctors, lawyers etc. that seek to agitate against discrimination and more often create alternate channels for professional activity.

- Women's wings or fronts of the political parties.
- Groups involved in research and documentation on women's issues.

The above mentioned groups and organisations take up women's problems and its members are mostly women and they are run by women. Saheli, Manushi, Stri Shakti, Stri Mukti Sangathana, Pennurimailyyakam etc. are some known women's organisations. All these groups have taken up various issues like atrocities against women. They issue pamphlets, collect signatures to support demands, organise protest rallies, make demonstrations to mobilise public opinion etc. They also organise street corner meetings, street plays, skits, songs and poster exhibitions. They also bring out feminist magazines to raise awareness among women. The autonomous movements besides creating general consciousness among women, exposed the conversation of the judiciary as in the Mathura Rape case, by removing the bill boards and stopping shows where women have been shown or used as sex symbols. These autonomous movements have also given rise to special interest groups involved in the anti-dowry and anti-rape campaigns. More research is being carried out on subjects related to women. In the academic field, women's studies became an upcoming field to be taken more seriously during the 1970s (Patel 1975). As a result of the pressure created by the women's movements, amendments in the laws regarding rape, dowry, marriage etc. were made.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

QB i) Name three women's organization which were formed after India attainted independence.

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QB ii) In which area Chipko movement started.

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8.7 LET US SUM UP

- Years of colonial domination had destroyed our indigenous crafts and depleted our natural resources.
- Industrialisation, changing technologies illiteracy, lack of mobility all resulted in the inability of women to cope with the new order.
- During this period the social reformists tried to channelise the Indian society by introducing constitutional and legal provisions and protecting the society and the women from discrimination and by providing equality to all the citizens irrespective of caste, creed, race, religion and sex.
- The Telangana Movement began in 1946 and continued till 1951. It is one of the two major post-war insurrectionary peasant struggles in India.
- The Telangana Movement (1946-51) was a protest of the people who wanted both food and freedom from the oppressive regime of the Nizam, the Patils and the Jagirdars in Hyderabad State.
- Chipko Movement was born in a small hilly village, Advani in Tehri Garhwal district of Uttar Pradesh.
- The illiterate adivasi women led this movement in December 1972.
- The anti-arrack movement of women in Andhra Pradesh was one of most historic and significant movements of the 1990s.
- The historic bangle waged by the women of Andhra Pradesh against the social evil of alcohol drinking is a magnum war in Indian social history.
- The myth of equality for women was shattered by the path breaking, Towards Equality Report of 1974.
- It focused attention on the fact that despite many progressive social legislations and constitutional guarantees, women's status had indeed not improved much.



8.8 FURTHER READING

1) Baig, Tara Ali. 1976. Women Power of India. New Delhi: Sultan Chand and Sons.

2) Banerjee, Narayan. 1992. Grassroots Empowerment Mimeograph. New Delhi: Center for Women's Development Studies.

3) Kumar, Radha. 1993. History of Doing. New Delhi: Kali for Women.

4) Lal, Ruby. 2004. Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



8.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to QA i) 1946

Answer to QA ii) Regulla Achamma, Chityala Ailamma, Pesaru Satbamma

Answer to QB i) Saheli, Manushi, Stri Shakti

Answer to QB ii) Tehri Garhwal district of Uttar Pradesh



8.10 MODEL QUESTION

QA) Short Question (Answer within 150 words)

i) Mention the different types of women's organisation that emerged during the autonomous movement period.

ii) Write a short note on women's movement that emerged after 1970s.

QB) Long Questions (Answer within 300-500 words)

i) Write an essay on the anti-arrack movement.

ii) Discuss the issues and concerns of Chipko movement.