

Women's movement: Autonomous Women's Groups

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Women's participation in campaigning policies in the late 70's and 80's and the coming out of autonomous women's groups in comeback to different issues have contribute to an motivating discuss on hypothetical, organisational and ideological perspectives of different women's groups and action strategies for dealing with issues of gender inequality, women's oppression and utilization. Opening of the voices of middle class women, make public issues of what was so far severely within the personal domain of the family, led to a questioning of the entire conceptualisation of family and the ideological dimension of women's domination.

The most recent decade saying the move brutally for women's human rights taken to ideological empire, to those issues which political parties, trade unions and other autonomous progressive organisations did not consider as their objectives for example issues of domestic violence, misdeed against women, sexual harassment, rape, dowry deaths etc. It also witnessed the emergence of 'autonomous women's groups.' What the term 'autonomous women's groups' mean? In what ways they are variant from adult national women's organisations! Desai and Patel think that "autonomous women's groups have been fighting for women's issues from a totally different perspective in a militant manner and articulating roots of women's oppression". Independence here is understood in terms of an independent existence from a political party, government sunshade or outside any form of political guidance, but at the same time not depoliticising women's query. The members of these organisations are not apolitical. They strongly believe that "the leadership of present women's movement is in the hands of the young, devoted, daring, theoretically oriented educated middle class women, some of them have opted out of mass based organisations because their experience showed that though such organisations were insightful to the problems of poor, denounced casteism and collectivism talked of fighting domination and utilization of the toiling masses, but were totally thoughtless to the domination of women and were perpetuating patriarchal norms and forms in both the political and the personal sphere".

In quite a lot of instance women's organisations have emerged from women's participation in broader peasants' and workers' movements as during the course

of their struggle women realised their own constraint and domination. A large amount of literature has grown on the militancy of working class women throughout the struggle. but, that did not sweep up sideways the usual patriarchal principles within these organisations. The experience of women activist have terrified up exciting issues in the current discuss on 'autonomous' women's organisations. Illina Sen writing about the experiences of Mahila Mukti Morcha in Madhya Pradesh says "women's position in Mahila Mukti Morcha has always been from the stand point of the working class women, with greater focus on class rather than sex. The issues have been class and situation specific although in some of the criticisms of traditional trade union activities by women such as the failure of women to emerge into movement's leadership and in building up the understanding about issues of women and mechanisation etc., there was an awareness of the disadvantaged position of women within the trade union movement. However, patriarchy per se is never posited as the main contradiction in the consciousness of the Mahila Mukti Morcha leadership or in the general body of the union. They avoid the question of unequal power relations within the working class because the debate on how far to take women's question has never been resolved satisfactorily at the level of the movement leadership. Where both husband and wife are the member of the trade union, highlighting unequal power relations between them is considered as weakening rather than strengthening the movement". In a coal mining area, describing the heroic struggle of women workers Mitra observes, that "some women have come to recognise the fundamental problems of dichotomous attitudes within workers' and peasants' organisations and the need to struggle for greater control over issues related to women workers per se". Proper or institutionalised politics is unmoving male dominated. some women activists have found that trade unions have not addressed themselves to issues like inequity against women in recruitment, promotions, division of labour in jobs and training, equivalent salary, motherhood advantage and reduction of expenditure etc.

The service of activists organising women separately (SEWA, WWF, Annapurna) and within larger movements (Shramik Sangathna, Dhulia, Chattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh, Chipko Andolan, Chatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini in Bodh Gaya struggles etc.), have been an area of active discuss. The Report of the National commission on Self-Employed Women says "as the trade union movements became stronger, the workers became more organised and wrested considerable concession for them. but, poor working women

gained little if anything at all. As the trade unions became politically powerful, the involvement of women decreases not only within the trade unions but within the organised workforce itself. It was after 1975 and with the increase of women's movement that the labour movement has very slowly begun to try and sort out these women". SEWA itself an offshoot of Textile Labour Association, broke off from its parent organisation because the male activist thought it was too assertive regarding issues of poor women".

The experiences of Shramik Sangathna in Maharashtra, Chattisgarh Mine Workers Association, Madhya Pradesh and numerous workers and peasant organisations, signify that even within the larger struggles women were organising independently as they often have diverse priorities. In Chipko movement it has come out somewhat clearly where women wanted fuel and fodder trees while men wanted trees which can generate cash. A problem across the world faced by poor women and an issue against which they have sustained to organise is alcoholism and wife misuse by drunken husbands. Nalini Nayak in her book on "Struggle within Struggle" describes women's active role in fisher folk's struggle.

All organised political groups have taken up issues of wages, working conditions etc., but women workers have to fight at both material and ideological level. At the level of political practice, Kalpagam argues that "there has been a quarrel between the organised left and independent left groups. The former accusing the latter of divisiveness in the working class movement and the latter accusing the left of not concerning itself with large masses of workers". In a hard hitting argument against the current trend in the self-governing women's movement, authors of a paper say, "Enthusiastic feminists who would like to see the outcomes of liberation here and now 'autonomously' of people's movement, enforce two caricature on those who think that women's liberation (i) that the resolution of the women's question is postponed to the post-revolutionary period; and (ii) in countries where socialist revolution has taken place, the women's question has not been resolved, meaning thereby that social vary by no means ensures women's liberation.

Their analysis does not see the contradictions between the interests of women and men. While the fight against women's groups following women's issues in a contracted sense and thus separating and marginalising themselves, are strong, the dilemma they face concerning their relationship with other democratic movements and building essential placement without compromising their

independence and by not losing view of gender dimensions remains fluid. The issue has been increased frequently but, the practice of many activists who have earlier worked with the official political organisations, has forced them to discard the logic that workers and peasant organisations will automatically take up women's rights issues particularly those which concern them as women.

During the UNDW, setting up of women's division inside party and trade unions, support for women's organisation under governmental activities and programmes and emphasis on proletarian organisations of poor rural and urban women, has further complicated the situation. The container for divide women's organisations has remain tough, though, the variety in such organisations in terms of activity, leadership, organisational forms, assets, issues and strategy and level of politicisation, raise some questions.

Kishwar while in conflict for the appearance and increase of autonomous women's organisation, emphasises that "they should not thin down the range of their politics to a select women's issues (rape, dowry, abortion, discrimination in wages and marriage laws) so representation themselves immobilized if they want to reorganize every aspect of our society and eliminate a variety of causes and form of power. By imprison ourselves to women's issue we marginalise ourselves to the process of executive. First organising as women and then merger hands with earlier groups make us further than a women's attention groups since women as half the intimidated groups in all these groups need to take an lively part in all these movements as well as in move aggressively for their own rights".

As well ideological dissimilarity, breakdown inside autonomous group pose a grave confront. The issue which keeps demonstration is the split between activist and non-activists, between urban middle class under enemy control groups focussing more on domestic violence and control inside the family and proletarian organisation of urban and rural poor violent against the force of continued survival and cannot be separate from gender issues. Issues of poverty, landlessness, thanks, oppression etc. are as a lot class issues as gender issues as women are even further oppressed and further adversely pretentious than men. An analysis of women in youth and students' move aggressively intense out that the split between activists and non-activists is not only of class and culture other than also one of need of communication flank by English speaking higher and middle class women and the conventional of Hindi speaking lower middle class women. The barrier is not only of language, dress,

life style etc. but also one of perception, political expression focus of their struggle (patriarchy, sexuality etc.) and idiom of protests and it makes it difficult for the latter to relate to them. Another problem is that of an arrogance and lack of sensitivity on the part of activists while dealing with other women and refusal to understand the each day pressures on these women and their coping mechanism.” In a month of self-reflection Patel, Sujata and Padma narrate that the organisational issues confronting the ‘Forum against Rape’, are how to deal with competition within ourselves and how to overcome barriers of class and culture. They feel that “autonomous women’s groups are faced with the contradictions between their newly realised power in the struggle against women’s subordination and their own position as women within home and society. It has lead to redefining the goals of class movement, as women’s question and class questions re-interlinked, but, such organisations will have to clash the double dangers of autonomy i.e. spiteful off women’s movements from an overall movement to change society and at the same time not getting sucked into the framework of the existing left, losing our goals and autonomy”.

As well the risk of disintegration within autonomous groups there are tension among those properly connected with political groups and those apprehensive with feminist politics. The very word feminism evokes diverse reactions and has a variety of levels of understanding and political response. As some women are diffident in by the word ‘feminism’ others feel that it needs to be redefined in the Indian context as the existential realism of women here poses a whole set of different issues. The latter group feels that the former groups has imbibe the significant false party line generated by the controlled media against ‘feminists’ and ‘feminism’ with the consequence that feminists are dismiss as middle class, ‘westernised’ and itinerant women out to obliterate the family institution. Arguing that ‘feminism’ does not derive its theoretical formulation they define feminism as “an consciousness of women’s oppression and exploitation in society, at work and within the family and conscious action by women and men to change this situation”. It is argue that “the main difference between previous feminists and present day ones is that earlier they struggle for the autonomous rights of women i.e. education, employment, right to property, right to vote etc. while today they have left further than mere lawful reform and are working towards the liberation of women”.

participant in a panel discussion generally decided that “women’s movement today faces the same situation where the needs of joint action in the interest of

women evokes ideological controversies and compromise which is bound to affect the quality of perspective, strategy and methods of mobilisation or of looking for alliance”.

The current trend inside women’s movement needs a deeper analysis and concentrated action to synthesise different experiences of women in different situation to develop a broad-based women’s movement. The inside divisions and politics, in which quite a few groups are involved, need to be debated and solution found. The issue of autonomous women’s organisations and their relationship with broader social and democratic movements, the fear of isolation and fragmentation issues of organisational structure and strategies are all crucial questions for the contemporary women’s movement. The question which also needs to be addressed is how to merge poverty, illiteracy and continued existence issues which affect both men and women with the specificity of women’s oppression and the need to mobilise women separately.

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