



## MAPPING THE REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

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### Abstract

This paper maps the issues concerning the autonomous Revolutionary women's in India from its earliest traceable origins to contemporary times. This paper includes a chronological account of campaign and struggle statement of the achievement of the movement, an attempt in made to sketch the evolution of the movement and the transitions within it, have at all stages involved a collage of influence, local, national and international. Therefore, in tracing the development of the women's movement in India, one would undoubtedly have to highlight the shifting one would concern and strategies that have outcome of the plurality of perspective that exists within the movement.

Key words: - Struggle, Movement, strategies, perspective, achievement.

### Introduction:

The vast majority of women live in village neighed down by feudal oppression that takes many forms. Intense economics exploitation, crude and brutal social oppression, a culture that not only denies her independence but also denigrates her in all possible manners. Hence, women from the oppressed class have had a stake in the destruction of the feudal rural order and have come forward to do so.

In the anti-feudal peasant struggle in the past century women have played very militant and active role. In the Tebbaga struggle in the 1940s the participation of women was very high and Nari Bahinis were formed for self-defence when state repression began. In the Telangana peasant uprising from 1947 to 1951 too women participate in large number and peasant and tribal women became guerrilla squad members and there are many accounts of the bravery and tenacity displayed by these women in the face of encirclement by the Indian Army, in the face of torture and sure death. Thus, when the Naxalbari uprising took place in 1967 in North Bengal under the leadership of Charu

Mazumdar. It is not surprising that poor peasant women and girls participated with full enthusiasm. In the Srikakulam struggle the participant of woman was remarkable, women became commander of the armed squad and struck terror in the hearts of the money landers and landlords of the area.

The armed struggle in fact began after an attack on women by the goondas of the landlords when they were on their way to participate in the peasant conference. The names of the women martyred in this struggle, women who preferred to be felled by the bullets of the armed police rather than surrender still shine high – Nirmala, Ankawna, Saraswati. Thus, these women defied their families and society to take on roles, which directly challenged their traditionally acceptable roles in society. They displayed the members heroism and determination to make the anti-feudal struggle a success. But the revolutionary movement at this time did not take up the conscious task of organising women's organization and taking up the struggle against manifestations of patriarchy. In the face of severe repression, the movements were suppressed.

When communist revolutionaries regrouped themselves and began building up the anti-feudal peasant struggle in the late 1970s one again. There were an upsurge of participation of women in the struggle. In the plains of central Bihar, in the fields and villages of Telangana (AP) the peasant movement grew like a storm. Among the first issues the movement confronted was the feudal privileges of the landlords over the wives and daughter of the labours working in their fields, especially of the Dalit castes. Subject to worst form of abuses and vulgarities of the landlord's men, bent down due to starvation and poverty, these poor women were easy prey for the landlords and their henchmen. Many of the violent struggles in Bihar and Telangana in the first part of the peasant movement in the 70s and 80s was to end this abuse and molestation, going in the name of "tradition". These struggles provide the background for the growth of the women's movement.

This revolutionary women's movement takes as its guiding the theory of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. Hence the Marxist analysis on the origins of the women's oppression governs its perspective that:

The masses of women face twin oppression. Just as their male members they undergo class oppression but at the same time they experience patriarchal oppression. Patriarchy in the system of male domination over women. The ruling classes of all exploitative societies institutionalize patriarchal oppression. But in addition to that men who are at the same time oppressed by the ruling classes resort to patriarchal domination. In the Indian context, the oppression faced by the women has to be seen in the framework of the nature of Indian society. After the withdrawal of the British in 1947, India became a semi-feudal, semi-colonial society under the rule of the big landlords and bureaucratic bourgeoisie. Therefore, in India the concrete struggle against patriarchy required the semi-feudal, semi-colonial structure be overthrown and a new democratic society be set up in its place. Thus without a new Democratic Revolutionary, all struggle and reforms can at best bring some partial changes in the lives of a section women but cannot bring about a qualitative changes in the lives of

women, cannot be a major step to eliminate patriarchy and emancipate women.

Impact of revolutionary politics on Gond women the impact of the revolutionary movement on tribal society in the Dandakarnya and also in the Eastern Ghats (Vishakhapatnam, Srikakulam, Vijayanagaram districts) has been even deeper. The majority of tribal in the district of Gadchiroli, Gondia, of Maharashtra, in Baster division of Chattisgarh, Balaghat in MP and Malakangiri of Orissa belong to a sub-tribe of the Gonds-Madia, Muria, Pardhan, Dorla or Rajgond though after tribes like Raut, Halbi also inhabit these forests.

Though there are particularities in the customs but their society is patriarchal. The women play an important part in production, they labour hard and long in the fields and home yet traditionally they have no rights to the land. They do not have any social right either. Their participation in the actual ritual is prohibited by custom, their role in community decision-making and arbitrations is also marginal. The family has the right to decide the marriage of a girl and boy. If a girl disagrees with their decision, then she is forced to go to the house of her in laws. In case of resistance, it was common to treat her inhumanly, tie her to a pole and carry her off, like an animal's carcass being carried after a hunt. Polygamy is common, a women's labour being prized. As result the incidence of sexual exploitation in the areas of struggle went down a great dead. And when the police repression began to crush the revolutionary forces and their struggles women learnt to face the police and help of keep the movement and organization alive. From all these experiences the Krantikaris Adivasi Mahila Sangathan (KAMS) was born. While the initial units were formed in Godchiroli district they gradually spread to every parts of the district and to the neighbouring district. Since 1995, the KAMS has spread by leaps and bounds in Bastar-Dantewada district, some parts of Bastar district and Kanker district, Gondia, Rajnandgaon and Balaghat. It later spread to Malkangiri district too and were the organization was grown rapidly. The KAMS took as its task to propagate against tribal customs which are oppressive for women. They struck a chord among young women and gained their active

support, units began to set up in village after village. Today there are more than 500 villages with units of the KAMS, the membership varying from 5 to 20 in each village.

**Adivasi Viplava Mahila Sangham** : In 1989 the Krantikaris Adivasi Viplava Mahila Sangham came to be formed. But in 1995 the name was changed to Adivasi Viplava Mahila Sanghan in the beginning of the 1990s the major struggle undertaken by the AVMS has been on the anti-liquor issue. Apart from this the organization has undertaken campaigns, organised meeting, rallies, people's courts on many issue. Since 1997, March 8 is being celebrated all over, even in the remote villages. Since, 1998 in bamboo cutting and other related work the struggle for equal pay for equal work has been taken up and won. Thus a tremendous change is coming about in the region because of the awakening among women and the growing organization among them.

Thus the revolutionary women's movement is growing in the midst of struggle. It is growing in Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal as well. As women are getting mobilised and organised in larger and larger members a section of them are also moving forward to join the armed struggle as fighter. The movement is creating a new woman, bold and brave, who is willing to sacrifice her life for the social cause – the names of the women who have sacrificed thus loom high in the sky. The list can go on. But they are fighting so the women can be unshackled and attain equally so that the poor can get justice and India can become an independent country free from imperialist exploitation.

The women of Jharkhand have a long history of heroic struggles against the British colonial rulers and the comprador-feudal rulers of post-British India. The santhal rebellion of 1857-58 has made an indelible imprint on the history of India. Women also participate in large number in the campaigns taken up taken by the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) in the late 1960s and 1970s. Women also led the anti-liquor and anti-wife-beating campaigns and campaigns against witch-hunting. Though the women have a role in the village councils they have no role in the higher institutions that take real decision. Thus, political participation of women

had not really improved over the past century also. It is against such a back drop that the Nari Mukti Sangh (NMS) commenced its activities in the early 1980s. It first started in the district of Giridih, a district in which the majority of the peasantry belongs to the Santhal tribes. It is a women's organization in which almost all the activists and leaders are drawn from the Adivasi (Santhals, Mundas, etc.) Issue taken up by NMS:

- Child Marriage
- Dowry and dowry related deaths/harassment
- Shibir Vivah
- Sexual harassment, rape
- Anti-liquor struggle & wife beating
- On health problems.
- Polygamy
- Equal wages for equal work
- Superstitions & witchcraft
- Saving the forest (Jungle Suraksha)

Thus though hard work and revolutionary zeal, through a conviction that women's situations can be changed only by organising the mass of poor and peasant women, through patient and determined effort and learning through doing has the Nari Mukti Sangh grown over the years.

### Conclusion

Looking back of the last four decades we can say with a fair amount of certainty that women's position in Indian society has change. This change has been to women's advantage. There has no doubt been a wider recognition of women's rights. Several steps taken towards equally among genders a greater sensitivity towards gender discrimination etc. The women's movement comprising of autonomous women's organisation, other women's groups, women's studies centre etc. has played no small role in the bringing about of this change. We can, therefore, say without hesitation that, over the last 40 years, the women's movement has affected the socio-political environment in India. However, this change has been at a gradual pace and has even affected certain sections more than others leaving yet much to be desired.

"The beginning is always today." Mary Shelley

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