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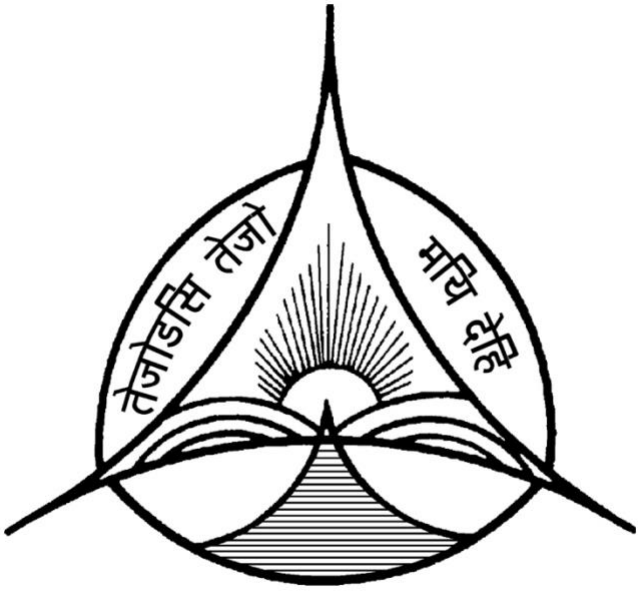

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Gender Equality or Gendered Equality? The Challenge before the Women's Movement in the 21st century

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More than 90 years after the publication of and debate on Katherine Mayo's *Mother India*, even as this piece is being written, there are visible knee-jerk responses to a report by the Thomson Reuters Foundation on India being the *most dangerous country for women in the world*. The present debate resonates similar shades of both Orientalist biases and perceptions underlying such surveys, as well as assertions based on hurt pride on the part of present day claimants of the mantle of 'nationalism', as seen in the early part of the 20th century.

What remains common to both these moments, nearly 100 years apart, is the fact that the issue of women's rights remains alive and, in a sense, central to the vision of India and its emergence as a democratic, modern nation state. Many of the aspects debated in the Central Legislature—even as India was reeling under the ravages inflicted by colonialism—still need to be addressed a century later. Starting with the right to be born, these include issues with regard women's rights in marriage, property, inheritance and succession; at the time of divorce, guardianship and custody; apart from other more visible rights within the ambit of policy formulation and citizenship. If nothing else, this should convey to us how deeply and inextricably the struggle for women's rights remains linked to efforts to strengthen the roots of democracy in India. It is becoming increasingly clear that this is perhaps also linked to what is nowadays being referred to as the 'Idea of India'.

Equally significant and perhaps providing a clue to the continued centrality of notions of women's rights is the fact that there is, since the time of the struggle for independence, a vibrant women's movement in India. This continues the struggle for equality, freedom and emancipation from discrimination, oppressive social practices, and prejudices and exploitative structures present in Indian society. In so doing, it has to and must engage with the prevalent political

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streams and groups in contemporary India, as was done by the foremothers of the present movement.

This paper argues that this engagement, as also the struggle that is on-going, remain deeply political since the structures and practices that women are up against are deeply rooted in Indian social structures. However, what is also now more clear is that this struggle for women's rights is today an intrinsic part of India's struggle to survive and evolve as a democracy. Finally, that for this struggle to succeed, there is a need to look beyond a narrow definition of women's rights, and individualist or individualised gender based perspectives, and build more organic links with social groups and communities which are subject to and organising against prevalent inequalities in Indian society.

Presently, notions of women's rights in India are in fact fractured, fragmented and fraught with tensions. While the women's movement has, historically, always seen within it reflections of different perspectives, the situation today is not just a continuation of these trends. Instead, globalisation has created islands of activity, each perhaps having a dialogue with other similar groups and tendencies abroad, but a hesitation and unwillingness to engage and negotiate differences on the ground. This poses a serious challenge. Over the last several decades, the way of moving forward in the movement has been to engage in a dialogue and negotiate positions through arriving at a common understanding, to allow for movement on the ground. Instead, today we see a more standardised system of reporting to the United Nations by NGOs, and by the state, with follow-up in the manner of implementation. Thus, there is little attempt at critical reflection on concepts, categories or methodological perspectives emerging from different locations since we are into a mode of developing *a single* universalised 'feminist' perspective.

This paper starts with questioning whether such a universalised, sanitised understanding of feminism is possible; whether it is worth pursuing such a goal from our specific location; further, what is likely to be gained and what may be lost in pursuing such a goal? It argues that in the complex field of politics in which the struggle for women's equality is being waged in India,

such an approach may indeed be a self-goal! It is argued that a larger umbrella of women's movement(s) may be more appropriate for us to observe and accommodate different locational perspectives in a society as complex as ours. This will allow for ideological debate and negotiation of different perspectives within the movement. This is also necessary if the movement has to grow into a force, which can enter into a dialogue for recognition of rights at different levels, and build alliances to initiate political and social action in different spheres.

Understanding Women and Politics in India

To start with, let us look at the observations of three major reports emanating from official sources with regard to women's status and rights, including, more specifically, in the political domain, as far apart as 1947, 1975 and 2015.

The first of these is the document, *Woman's Role in a Planned Economy* (*WRPE*), which was the report of the Sub-committee on Women set up under the National Planning Committee (NPC) in 1938. The Committee was set up by the Congress when it came to power in certain provincial governments, prior to independence. Sensing that the country was moving towards independence, the Congress, at that time led by Subhash Chandra Bose, embarked on an exercise to lay out its vision under the stewardship of Jawaharlal Nehru. The reports/document took some years to come into print since the Second World War, the Quit India movement, arrests and much else intervened. Nevertheless, in his introduction to the report, finally published in 1947, K.T. Shah, Honorary General Secretary of the NPC, observed that:

> the political status of woman needs equal recognition along with the social or economic place assigned to her by law or usage. In a Democracy, such as we may now claim India to be, the people collectively are sovereign. Every member of the people must, therefore, necessarily claim to be part of that sovereign authority. This part is exercised normally by the right to vote at periodical elections to the Legislature and the Executive, and so influence the policy and working of the Government of the country, through the chosen

> representatives of the people. This reorientation, even if it does not bring instant relief to woman in many of the cases mentioned above, would nevertheless impart to her a growing consciousness of her place and realisation of the importance of her work. This cannot but give her, in harmony with the changed outlook regarding citizenship, its rights and obligations in a modern civilised community, a full realisation of her own potentiality…[1]

Shah drew attention to the need to recognise women's proper place in the social system, and their real role in the country's planned economy. Noting that 'Democracy has been late in coming in this country...', he asserted 'that democracy would fail to achieve its purpose if and so long as woman is debarred from any economic or cultural rights, privileges or obligations of equal citizenship. Equal opportunity is now guaranteed to all citizens of India; and there is no reason to doubt the guarantee will fail to be implemented. Woman, will, therefore, have soon an equal chance with man to realise to the full whatever potentiality she may have in her to serve the community' (*WRPE* 1947: 23–24).

The authors of the *WRPE* asserted that the political status of women needed equal recognition along with the social or economic place assigned to them by law or usage. The Final Report of the Sub-Committee on Woman's Role in Planned Economy presented by Mridula Sarabhai, Secretary of the Sub-Committee, records the resolution which was adopted:

1. On the basis of the Karachi Congress, 1931, declaration of Fundamental Rights of Citizenship in India, it is resolved:-
   (a) In a planned society, woman's place shall be equal to that of man. Equal status, equal opportunities, and equal responsibilities shall be the guiding principles to regulate the status of woman whatever the basis of society in the Plan;
   (b) Woman shall not be excluded from any sphere of work merely on the ground of her sex;

(c) Marriage shall not be a condition precedent to the enjoyment of full and equal civic status and social and economic rights by woman;

(d) The State shall consider the individual as the basic social unit and plan accordingly.[2]

Nearly two-and-a-half decades later, an exercise to review women's status in India was undertaken by the government appointed Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI). The CSWI, in its report, *Towards Equality* (*TE*), noted that the 'political status of women can be defined as the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in the shaping and sharing of power and in the value given by society to this role of women' (*TE* 2012*:* para 7.1) It further noted that the guarantee of political equality as per the Indian Constitution, prohibiting discrimination, inter-alia, on grounds of sex, 'was a radical departure not only from the socio-cultural norms prevailing in traditional India but also in the context of the political evolution of even most advanced countries at that date' (ibid.: para7.2). Members of the CSWI noted that 'the unity between political, economic and social issues that characterized the freedom movement was one of the causes for women's high degree of participation' in that movement. They felt there was a 'growing trend of disillusionment with the political process among women', and surmised that 'the divorce between social problems that affect women directly, and the political process, has been one of the major causes of women's lower participation in politics in recent years' (ibid.: para 7.47). The Committee further went on to examine the links between economy, society and culture, in discussions with women, including women in political parties. It noted a 'chasm between the values of a new social order proclaimed by the Constitution and the realities of contemporary Indian society as far as women's rights are concerned remains as great as at the time of independence' (ibid.: para 7.99).

The CSWI discussed at length the participation of women in the political process and parties. It noted the declining trend in the number of women legislators, and that the 'parties reflect the established values of a male dominated society, which would be difficult to alter without certain structural changes in the socio-political set-up.' It was in this context that the Committee also

discussed the matter of reservations for women in the legislative domain. It concluded that 'a 30% reservation of seats in the legislative bodies for women will alter the very character of our legislature and will compel the political parties to change their strategies and tactics and induce them to give women their due' (*TE* 2012: para 7.109 [b]) While expressing the hope that this would lead to increase in women's participation and motivate them to shoulder their 'political responsibilities', the Committee was aware of the fact that the question of representation involved both quantitative and qualitative issues. Also, that this would not be retrogression from the 'doctrine of equality of sexes and the principle of democratic representation', since it would 'serve the long term objectives of equality and democracy in a better manner than the present system where inequalities get intensified' (ibid.: para 7.111). It should be noted that three members, including the chair of the Committee, Phulrenu Guha, did not agree with the recommendation that reservation of seats in municipalities be adopted by all states as a transitional manner (ibid.: Chapter 7, end note).

This is where the challenge continues to lie. Today, given the vast amount of evidence gathered by both scholars and activists in the movement, there is no denying the fact of discrimination. The High Level Committee on the Status of Women in India (henceforth HLC), set up by the Government in 2013, observed that the period after independence and, more specifically, the last four decades, had

> witnessed enormous amount of feminist writings and activism, data and publications, grassroots struggles and protests, legislative and programmatic responses, and national endorsements to various women's rights based international treaties and initiatives. What is however not so self-evident is, if all these have had commensurate, and even measurable impact towards creating a gender equitable society in general, and improving the lives and status of women and girls in particular. (High Level Committee Report (HLC): Introduction, para 1.1)

It further noted that the

> statistics on status of women in India are paradoxical and intriguing. …there have been gains; there have also been retrogressive trends; and there have been barriers to advancement. Three significant facts that highlight women's neglect are (a) adverse sex ratio, with child sex ratio declining; (b) Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) of a disturbingly high level; and (c) declining female workforce participation rate (ibid.: para 1.4).

It went on to mention that 262 districts in the country were officially classified as 'Gender critical' (ibid.: para 1.6), and that

> like inter-state, inter-district variations, there are significant variations between different social groups of women. Dalit women, Muslim women, Adivasi women, Single and excluded women especially widows, Differently abled women, elderly women, Migrant, Displaced and trafficked women, women in the unorganized workforce, Women infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, and Women in conflict zones—all of them bear the burden of multiple marginalization and on various indicators, fare lower compared to their male counterparts as well as women are from other communities. The intersection of gender with caste, religion, ethnicity and exclusion in various forms adds further layers of discrimination reinforcing gender oppression (HLC para 1.7).

The HLC concluded that 'a woman is a rightful citizen with firm and clear commitments made by the Constitution of India', and that women's aspirations for personal and political growth 'should be addressed holistically rather than in piecemeal manner' (ibid.: Epilogue, para 1478).

The HLC had set out to examine some key questions that it identified as follows: whether there had been a positive change in the status of women since 1989. How effective were the law, programmes and interventions in addressing the dynamic and complex reality of women and their agency in addressing vulnerabilities? Whether the power structures that operate in our society provide equal access to 'resources' and 'opportunities' in enabling women to bring about a positive change in their 'condition' and 'position'. Does the current development paradigm

contain spaces that translate into empowerment for women? (ibid.: para 1.45). It noted that the Committee had put

> emphasis on the role the State must play in ensuring equality and underscored the point that entitlements must be guaranteed through gender-sensitive institutions; that adequate resources must be planned and allocated through gender budgeting and other explicit means; and that strong monitoring mechanisms must be in place with accountability towards the community of women that these interventions seek to address. The Committee had also underlined the need for rigorous institutional reforms including those of the private sector and media to ensure effective implementation of women's empowerment programs and creation of gender equitable norms in our journey towards a Gender-just India (ibid.: para 1.61).

Attention is being drawn to these aspects because today, media experts and many others who have a genuine concern for women's rights tend to focus attention primarily on misogyny and mindsets as the root of all problems. In this context, it is important to note the observations in *Towards Equality*:

> the disabilities and inequalities imposed on women have to be seen in the total context of a society, where large sections of the population—male and female, adults and children—suffer under the oppression of an exploitative system. It is not possible to remove these inequalities for women only. Any policy or movement for the emancipation and development of women has to form a part of a total movement for removal of inequalities and oppressive social institutions, if the benefits and privileges won by such are to be shared by the entire women population and not to be monopolized by a small minority (*TE* 2012: para 1.39 [6]).

The reports cited above, as well as the large body of research laid out by scholars focusing on women and gender in India, have left no doubt about the persistent unequal status of women in India. All the three reports, which specifically focused on enquiry into the rights and status of women to address the issue of women's equality, noted that there is a need to understand the wider socio-economic processes and development policies. Given the evidence of discrimination against women and other social groups, and also the broader influence and acceptance of notions of women's equality, there is, clearly, a need to look deeper to examine and explore the structural roots of inequality in the present context. While the making of India's Constitution and Ambedkar's sterling support for women's rights provided a solid bedrock for efforts to achieve social equality, the reports from post-independence India record that the trajectory of policies pursued with regard to social and economic development in the subsequent decades continuously posed challenges to the same.

Today, it may be pertinent to pose the question as to why responses and images of women facing discrimination, oppression and patriarchy are increasingly more entrenched in gender roles and stereotypes from select locations. Why do these discussions sidestep, if not altogether evade, questions that are raised by the movement at a more fundamental level with regard to development processes and policies? Is it not time to ask why certain kinds of incidents become items for primetime news hour debates, and why others fail to catch the public eye in discussions with regard to safety, dignity and equality? Further, why is the critical lens selective and not consistently scrutinising those pronouncements or judgements which have a significant bearing on the status of women on the ground. This is not the place to examine statistics in each of the different spheres. However, a look at recent developments in a crucial issue over the last two decades makes it obvious that India continues to witness a policy of 'one step forward two steps back', if not outright reversal of gains made by women in specific arenas. This goes beyond ambiguity in the state's response, or the lack of implementation, as some would have us believe.

Women's participation in political processes and decision making offers a good example of both the lack of political will as well as efforts to block those initiatives which have the potential to

undermine the status quo with regard to equality and equations of power in the social system. The 73rd–74th amendments, ensuring representation in local self-governance, marked a historic step and gave representation to women from the most marginalised communities in rural India, apart from ensuring women's voice in the local bodies (Buch 2010).

This also led to the demand for more representation for women in state legislatures and in Parliament. While the Legislative amendment with regard to this awaits passage, the fact is that there have been significant curtailments and even reversals on the issue of representation in the local bodies themselves. These are visible in new conditionalities imposed by state governments. The first was to disqualify women with more than two children from contesting (2005).

In recent years, fresh clauses relating to educational background, among others, were added to the eligibility conditions. On 14 August 2015, the government of Haryana promulgated the Haryana Panchayati Raj (Amendment) Ordinance, 2015, inserting Clause (v) in Section 175 of the Haryana Panchayati Raj Act, 1994. With this clause, the criteria for disqualification from becoming a sarpanch or a panch (member) of a gram panchayat, or a member of a panchayat samiti or zilla parishad was expanded to those: (a) who have not passed matriculation examination or its equivalent examination from any recognised institution/board. In the case of a woman candidate or candidate belonging to Scheduled Castes, the minimum educational qualification was middle pass. In the case of a woman candidate belonging to a Scheduled Caste contesting election for the post of panch, the minimum educational qualification was 5th Class pass; (b) who fail to pay arrears, if any, to the Primary Agriculture Co-operative Society, District Central Co-operative Bank and District Primary Co-operative Agriculture Rural Development Bank; (c) who fail to pay arrears of electricity bills; or (d) who fail to submit self-declaration to the effect that he has a functional toilet at his place of residence.

The All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) filed a Writ Petition on 14 September 2015 to argue that the Ordinance/Act was 'illegal, arbitrary, unreasonable and

violative of the Constitution of India', and was 'an onslaught on the canons of democracy' since it: denied the citizens of India the opportunity to participate in local self-government and the democratic process by acting *mala fide* through a colourable exercise of power; it arbitrarily denied the citizens of India their fundamental right to equality under Article 14 of the Constitution; contravened the provisions of the Constitution and completely disregarded the fact that the amendment disenfranchised a vast majority of the citizens of India; was in contravention of the Constitution (Seventy-Third) Amendment Act, 1994; and violated the spirit and tenor of the Representation of People Act and the Constitution.

Evidence of how these conditions were aimed at curtailing the participation of women, and men, from the socially marginalised groups was brought before the courts and the government. As had happened in the case of the two-child norm, these clauses too were upheld by the Supreme Court, when challenged (*Women's Equality* 2015**).** These measures effectively aim at stemming the tide of popular participation in local self-governance. Data from the Census of India, 2011, had shown that in effect, the disqualifications would bar 55.63 per cent of non-SC men, 68.65 per cent of non-SC women; 62.16 per cent SC men; and 83.06 per cent SC women.[3] This measure also goes against the experience and research which shows that women, despite facing hostility at different levels, defied social prejudices to mark their presence in local governance institutions. Such ordinances and judgements from the higher courts undermine the gains made by women's participation in these bodies.

It is only too well known that the Women's Reservation Bill (WRB) still awaits passage, more than 20 years after the initial debates and consensus built around the committee headed by Geeta Mukherjee (Agnihotri 2010). Despite its majority in the Lok Sabha, and its commitment to women's rights, the present government has thus far not bothered to bring the bill for passage in the house! Or is it that this government sees patriarchy and victimhood only with regard to Muslim men and women, respectively? There is of course the larger, long-term issue of the need to explore other ways of taking forward the agenda of pushing for women's rights in decision-making processes and on issues of governance. However, discussion in the media on women in

decision-making has now shifted from panchayats to Women in the Boardroom, a la 'Lean in' and Sheryl Sandberg!

The 1980s in India saw some successful new initiatives from the women's movement due to the pressure built up by the post-Emergency democratic upsurge. However, in recent years there have been continuous attempts from the top to reverse these gains. These decades have also seen many shifts in terms of the discourse amongst activists and the context in which they operate. Not the least being an increasingly hostile environment for discussions on women's rights. Against this background, it becomes incumbent on those speaking for the movement to start the discussion on rights afresh. On the ground, women from marginalised sections of society seek and await positive interventions, which may relieve them of the ravages of economic policies. These have rendered them more vulnerable on an everyday basis, be they part of the dispossessed rural masses or the amorphous category of urban slum dwellers, amongst whom a large majority are Dalits.

There is a popular impression that globalisation has opened many doors for women. The fact is that it has closed many more, making it imperative that new ones be opened. This is true for women specifically, and for the population in general. Research by the Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS) shows that women's participation in the work force has declined, and, further, that they are concentrated in low-paid categories of work with poor and insecure working conditions. It is important that discussions on violence against women examine the roots and linkages of such phenomena with social trends at other levels. The vulnerabilities and increasing insecurity faced by women need to be understood in the context of the precarious lives led by a vast section of women and men. These conditions arise from increasing inequalities brought about by the globalisation process.

However, what we are not registering sufficiently is the growth of the middle class in India in the globalisation era. It is this burgeoning middle class, sometimes also referred to as the 'new' middle class, which is driving media perceptions of governance, rights and entitlements. As a

result, there is often a hesitation to recognize the need to explore the linkages between development processes, urbanisation, and the devastation of the rural economy where the majority of women are located. This is most visible in discussions on violence. There is today wider acceptance of the perception that violence against women is 'random' and not embedded in structures which uphold inequality and discrimination. The media too does not often track the violence perpetrated in contexts other than that of metropolitan cities. Joblessness, increasing poverty and distress-driven migration have resulted in a volatility in social processes which adds to the insecurities and vulnerabilities that the mass of women (especially) are subject to. In such a context, surveys broadcasting India as the 'Most Dangerous Country in the World' or Delhi as the 'Most Unsafe City' further fuel perceptions which perpetuate formulations such as the existence of a 'Rape Culture' in India. While no one would disagree with the widespread prevalence of patriarchy, misogyny and discriminatory practices against women in India, what such perceptions fuel is a modern day version of Orientalist perceptions that there is something unique to India and Indian society which drives it towards such savagery and barbarism. In fact, what they seek to hide is the fact that these conditions are specifically born out of modern day policies of globalisation and development.

It is modern day capitalism which re-imposes slave like conditions on workers, including women workers. This also turns attention away from the abdication by the state and modern day governments of their responsibility to provide universal guarantees to the rights of citizens, which includes women, as per the Constitution of India. In other words, this gaze from supposedly gendered perspectives can in turn be insensitive and immune to critical examination of material social reality.

It may be worth noting that a study focusing on growing inequalities in India highlighted the 'inequalising nature of globalization' in the last two decades (Kannan 2014: 203). He drew attention to 'a systematic pattern of social inequality', and a 'dominance of social inequality over gender inequality'. This clearly posed a further issue of the 'mismatch between the politics for greater inclusion and the economics of exclusion'. It needs to be remembered that these

observations were being made in a context when the economy had, since the early 1990s, registered unprecedented high growth rates. Kannan went on to argue that 'for developing countries like India the current context compels a relook at the neo-liberal model of growth…' to reverse this emerging dualism and the dangers arising from this. He argues that,

> it is not merely enough to draft an inclusive policy by having a number of adjunct or supplementary programmes and schemes. Instead, it necessitates a restoration of the original agenda of national economic development of which inclusion is an integral part. It would also call for prioritizing the elimination of hunger, socio-economic security for all, beginning with food, shelter, education, and health care… (ibid.: 238).

Thus, women face a double challenge: to convince society of the need for equal rights for women, and, further, to recognise that this struggle is by definition part of a larger struggle for equality. However, not everyone who believes in equal rights for women accepts or believes in the principle of social equality. Fewer still may agree with the need to identify or be part of struggles to achieve the same. Further, coalescence in the public mind of belief in gender equality and feminism itself poses questions at several levels. Those professing faith and allegiance or support for feminism may not find common cause with the broader agenda of equality or democracy. Interestingly, there would be men and women on both sides of these divides; meaning, thereby, that the issue goes beyond body politics and gender divides.

It needs to be recognised that in the 1980s and 1990s, there emerged a vibrant mass-based women's movement which had a vast influence on the youth, men and women in India. The results of this were there for all to see in what in popular memory is seen as the Nirbhaya moment. Young women displayed unbound energy and willingness to confront the insensitivity displayed by the establishment. However, should they accept a perspective which allows for insensitivity to class, caste and community based inequalities? Is there not a need to interrogate the categories of 'gender' or 'feminism' from more grounded concerns born out of the historic

struggle by women in India from the time of the freedom struggle? It is for these young new entrants to take the ideological battle within the women's movement forward.

As the struggle for gender equality broadens, different viewpoints and perspectives will emerge and be reflected within the women's movement. There is a need to understand the challenge faced in building alliances across movements, even when the consciousness of those touched by the momentum generated by the movement does not always keep pace. The need for debate and discussion within the women's movement is greater today. While we continue to push for more women in the larger political domain, there is, at the same time, the need for engagement with regard to the definitions and the terms of politics within the women's movement. Clearly, while it is important to draw attention to sexual difference and unequal gender relations into a study of society, it is equally important to link this process of critical examination to the wider study of inequalities and political differences among social groups, castes, communities and classes. [4]

It is necessary to recognize this today since there is a clear and visible preference to depict incidents as one-off episodic and spontaneous responses, as well as a projection of these as the defining moments. A social historian cannot ignore the fact that in history, success in social movements often arises from the convergence of the synergy between spontaneous responses to incidents and organised resistance. The experience of organised struggles when it melds with the spontaneous ground swell imparts to the display of social anger the sustaining capacity required for meaningful social change on a historical basis.

This is all the more necessary if the youth, women and scholars are to comprehend India's journey from Mayo to Modi in contemporary times. There is an urgent need to reflect on what has changed and what has not.

Eric Hobsbawm observed that while the women's movement was one of the lasting achievements of the 20th century, to sustain itself the movement and women needed to speak up beyond a narrow definition of women's rights and movement. He based his observation on the fact that,

> even the conscious development of the movement for emancipation is not entirely seized by concentrating on its militant spokespeople. For an important section of it, and almost certainly the majority of those who took part in it outside Britain, America and possibly Scandinavia and the Netherlands, did not do so by identifying with specifically feminine movements, but by identifying with woman's liberation as part of wider movements of general emancipation, such as the labour and socialist movements.

The significance of these words can be seen if one takes an overview of how women's movements in the Third World developed differently. In India itself the success of mass-based organisations of women, such as the All India Democratic Women's Association and its emergence as the largest women's organisation in the 1990s, stemmed from its ability to mobilise poor and working class women along multi-focal axes of equal rights based on identities linked to citizenship, class and gender. However, post- liberalisation, there has been a privileging of patriarchy and gender identity as the plank for a feminist assertion. While this has opened up several issues to mount a critique of prevalent inequalities, the gender lens tends to get focused on narrow middle class responses, perceptions and locations. This is not to argue that the demand for women's equality is not legitimate in itself, but to point to the need to build wider platforms aimed at social transformation.

Reflecting on this subject, I am reminded of an exhibition my friends and comrades organised at Jawaharlal Nehru University in 1980 under the aegis of the JNU Women's Committee, of which I was then Convener. The last poster in the exhibition read, 'So long as women are not free the people cannot be free'. The exhibition was on display at the exhibition hall of the then campus for several weeks, which also coincided with observing 8 March as International Women's Day and the campaign against rape in 1980. Every day, some of us would volunteer to keep the exhibition open to allow for visits by the university community. Often, as we watched the responses, we tinkered with some of the posters that we had put up. One day my friend Meera Velayudhan and I decided to put up another poster alongside the last poster in the exhibition.

This read, 'Can women be free if the people are not free?' I have chosen to narrate this anecdote not because I wish to frame the subject in the mode of a personal narrative, but to highlight a dilemma that I believe continues to haunt the women's movement in India and elsewhere in this century. In fact, as ideological alternatives to capitalism and now globalisation no longer appear to be on the political agenda of most movements, confronting inequalities in the social world poses a more serious challenge than those faced in the last century. The personal is always political, in more ways than we would like to see.

Notes

[1] See Shah's 'Introduction', p. 24, in 'Woman's Role in Planned Economy' (henceforth WRPE).
[2] Excerpted from Chapter X, WRPE, p. 225.
[3]AIDWA Press Release, 10 March 2016.
[4] For more on the approaches to understanding gender difference and democracy, see Phillips (1993). *Democracy and Difference*, Pennsylvania State University, Pennsylvania, 1993).

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