



Evolution of Women's Movements in India

For Prelims: Economic Survey 2022-23, SHG, Nationalist Movement, State-Led Movement for Economic Empowerment.

For Mains: Evolution of Women's Movement in India.

Why in News?

According to the **Economic Survey 2022-23**, there are about **1.2 crore Self Help Groups** (SHG) in India, most of which are **all-women**. The **Indian women's movement** has been recognized globally for its vibrancy. However, the **evolution of the movement has received less attention**.

How the Women's Movement Evolved in India?

▪ Evolution:

- The movement has **transformed over time from serving as a beacon for the nationalist movement to a rights-based civil society movement to a state-led movement for economic empowerment.**

▪ Three Phases:

◦ Nationalist Movement (1936-1970s)

- Women were the **face of the nationalist movement**. The clarion call by **Mahatma Gandhi to the 1936 All India Women's Conference** was the hallmark of a nationalist movement that relied on women to serve as its face.
- The movement aimed to give women political power. The political history of the Indian **women's movement was observed when women satyagrahis were arrested during the salt satyagraha** and the **Quit India movement**.
 - These movements set the stage for women's leadership in politics.

◦ Rights-Based Civil Society Movement (1970s-2000s)

- Women's groups were mobilised to sensitize women about their rights.
 - The greatest success of this mobilisation came when the **73rd Amendment to the Constitution** was passed, reserving one-third of seats in panchayat and leadership positions in local bodies for women.
- **Chipko**, one of the earliest ecofeminist movements in the world broadcasting pictures of women clinging to trees to protest logging.
 - It was a non-violent agitation which originated in Uttar Pradesh's Chamoli district (now Uttarakhand) in 1973.
- **Also, Self Employed Women's Association** began to **unionise women** in the informal sector leading the advocacy for reforms in legal and social protection for women workers.

◦ State-Led Movement for Economic Empowerment (2000s-present)

- The government invested heavily in **building and supporting SHGs**.
- SHGs **function mainly as thrift and credit institutions**.
- The movement aimed to enhance women's access to income-generating activities.
- The movement seeks to address the **deficiency of vocational skills and entrepreneurship among women**.

What are Self Help Groups?

▪ About:

- **SHGs** are informal associations of people who choose to come together to find ways to improve their living conditions.
- It can be defined as a **self-governed, peer-controlled information group** of people with similar socio-economic backgrounds and having a desire to collectively perform a common purpose.

▪ Objectives:

- SHG relies on the notion of “Self Help” to encourage **self-employment and poverty alleviation**.
- To build the **functional capacity of the poor and the marginalized** in the field of employment and income generating activities.
- To **resolve conflicts through collective leadership** and mutual discussion.
- To **provide collateral free loans** with terms decided by the group at the market driven rates.
- To work as a collective guarantee system for members who propose to **borrow from organised sources**.

Conclusion

The women's movement in India has evolved over time, with each phase addressing different aspects of women's lives. The future of the women's movement in India depends on how effectively the state-led movement can transform women's lives by taking economic empowerment programs to scale.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q.1 Two of the schemes launched by the Government of India for Women's development are Swadhar and Swayam Siddha. As regards the difference between them, consider the following statements: (2010)

1. Swayam Siddha is meant for those in difficult circumstances such as women survivors of natural disasters or terrorism, women prisoners released from jails, mentally challenged women etc., whereas Swadhar is meant for holistic empowerment of women through Self Help Groups.
2. Swayam Siddha is implemented through Local Self Government bodies or reputed Voluntary Organizations whereas Swadhar is implemented through the ICDS units set up in the states.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (d)

Mains

Q.1 “Empowering women is the key to control population growth”. Discuss. (2019)

Q.2 Discuss the positive and negative effects of globalization on women in India? (2015)

Q.3 Male membership needs to be encouraged in order to make women's organization free from gender bias. Comment. **(2013)**

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