

Analysing Feminism In The Light Of Ethnic Movements Of North East India

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ABSTRACT

Feminism as a theory has evolved and women's political experiences all over the world have expanded the arena of feminism. Indian feminist theorists after 1975, have been trying to define, redefine and reconceptualise the existing gender relations in the Indian society. Indian feminist analysis of patriarchy and gender is often understood with the participation of women in political and civil rights movements. For example, feminist and gender issues of Indian women in the twentieth century were articulated as a part of women's participation in the Freedom Movement of India. the status of women in different societies of India also different from each other. the existence of a tribal economy, the status of women in the region is very unique from rest part of India. after independence, many ethnic movements emerged in this region where a huge women participation is noticed. thus, the participation of women in the ethnic movements add new political experiences and which pave the way to reanalyse the feminist theorist of India in a new light. This paper tries to analyse feminism as a part of ethnic movements of Northeast India.

Keywords: North East, ethnic movement, identity question, feminism

INTRODUCTION

Feminism is not merely a discourse to be analysed but a method of bringing about social change. It has a diverse range of understanding starting from ideologies to the socio-political movements. Feminism as an ideology believes that in the patriarchal social structure women also have to experience oppressions, dominations and exploitations in both public and private spheres. Again, women's liberation movements all over the world aim to eliminate all forms of oppression against women and struggle for equal rights and status for women. Though feminists have always tried to achieve the common objective to challenge the existing patriarchies and aim to arrive at an egalitarian social order. But within the discourse of feminism there have been divergent understandings of patriarchal oppressions and thus the issues articulated by them are extensive and diverse in nature.

The whole North- East region of India including Assam had faced the challenges of the manifold armed conflicts since the very dawn of Independence. From the 1970s a series of anti- state democratic as well as armed movement had intensified among the various social groups of Assam. In this ethnic movement also a huge participation of women were noticed. The participation of women in these ethnic movements had accelerated women's political activism. In the course of time the feminists in India try to theorize women's oppressions and try to find out possible ways to overcome such oppressions. The different articulations reflect the multiple contexts of women's issues that exist in the field of women's movement in India. In this respect understanding women's participation in the identity-based movements of North East could provide a new theoretical understanding of Indian feminism.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The work covers an area where limited literatures are available. Only a very few numbers of research articles and a limited number of books are available. To have a clear theoretical understanding some books and articles on ethnic movements and feminism are dealt with. Along with we have also reviewed some articles published in English as well as Assamese magazines and journals which are relevant to the present study. Phukon Girin (Intl Academic Pub, 2002) in his book Ethnicity and Polity in South Asia elaborately analysed the ethnic politics of Assam from theoretical standpoint. M. Bahati Kuumba in her book Gender and Social Movements (Rawat publication, Jaipur, 2003) analysed that gender plays a very important role in each phase of social movements. M.N. Karna's book Social Movement in North-East India (Indus Publishing, New Delhi, 1998) analysed different movements of North East India.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY:

This research has been undertaken to fulfill the following objectives:

1. The study has tried to develop an adequate theoretical framework so that it may be used in understanding the feminism of India.
2. The study has traced the historical background, origin, circumstances and growth of the feminist activism in the North east India.

METHODOLOGY:

Both historical and analytical methodologies have been used in the present study. The sources of information are collected from secondary sources.

DISCUSSIONS:

North East India is comprised of seven states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. This region is characterised by immense ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity. Number of ethnic tribes in this region are more than 250. The politics of Northeast is influenced by its unique historical, geographical and socio-economic factors. In the post-independent period specially after decade 70s a number of identity based autonomous movements emerged in different states of north east India. Women in North east India have played a pivotal role in all these ethnic movements. In spite of existing patriarchy in the society of North east self-sufficient backward agricultural economy was practiced in this region where women took an active role in the economic affairs.

Again along with the agricultural work women of North East were involved in the practice of animal husbandry, weaving etc. and thus they assisted the family economy. The tribal economy allowed women's free movement and therefore from Pre-Colonial era, women of North East could enjoy some freedom of mobilization. On the other hand, as domestic products were the base of traditional economy, women of North East were indispensably involved with the Economic production systems.

Different feminist scholars in India have their own analysis on the questions of women's oppressions and ways to overcome these. These analyses lead to the divisiveness and sectarian tendencies within the discourse of feminism in India. These theoretical analyses of different feminist groups do not depend on the traditional theories for their existence but create a new relation with theory through localized articulation of women's concerns and issues. Thus the autonomous feminist activism that emerged in different parts of India has tried to articulate the women's specific issues such as wife-beating, dowry deaths, rape, sexual harassment, etc. and organized massive movements against these gender based oppressions. But another group of feminist theorist gave their prime concern on the issues like price rise, equal wages for women, availability of work etc. But prominent feminist writer and activist Gail Omvedt has referred to the multifaceted nature of women's movements in the contemporary world and their wider articulations of new issues and concerns. Thus she has viewed that to analyse women's issues; the effort should be given to characterize the specificity of women's oppressions and to analyse the link between women's oppression and the other forms of oppression. Thus, all the women related issues articulated through the ethnic movements of North East India can expand the discourse of Indian Feminism.

The North- East region of India including Assam has faced the challenges of the manifold armed conflicts since the very dawn of Independence. From the 1970s a series of anti- state democratic as well as armed movements intensified among the various social groups of North east India. These armed conflicts led to the violation of the rights of the common people of the region. In this political context, a number of women in the North- East region were assaulted, humiliated, raped and murdered by the both the state and the non- state actors. Thus strong campaign against these military atrocities had gradually transformed into a mass resistance movement. Many scholars analyzed the issues of state and militant outfit atrocities against women with a feminist lens and tried to develop a movement against such

oppression. These mass mobilizations of rural and urban women against the army atrocities could draw the attention of the local as well as National media.

The peacebuilding initiatives of women in the context of ethnic movements of Northeast India have widened the area of women's political experiences and thus contributed to theoretical development of feminism. The study of the context of each ethnic movements of North east India shows that women often form organisations to address ethnic tensions. Here we can give example of organisations like Naga Mother's Association(NMA)and Meira Paibi.Such organisations advocated for peace, social justice and human rights.

Women in north east India have played a very pivotal role in ethnic movements. The active participation of women is highly motivated by their positions to advocate for human rights, peace and reducing conflict. Thus women's activism in the North East India has become a symbol of resistance against militarization. Women's collective action against atrocities some times creates a positive environment where women of different ethnic groups have organised together to show their protest against humiliation.

CONCLUSION:

During the last three decades of twentieth century the issue of Human Rights in the context of conflict situation prevailing in the North Eastern region had been very much live issue all over India. this conflict situation is originated from the confrontation of Indian state with various militant and non-militant movements. Though women were often the major sufferer in conflict situations as victim of rape, as widow or as single mothers , the gender dimension of the ongoing human right debate on the Nort East was rarely emphasised. Thus the study of violation of women's right in conflict situations with particular reference of North East situation can pave the way to evolve a theoretical framework to understand gender relation in Indian society.

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