

Andhra Pradesh and the Naxalite movement. As women's militancy developed, gender-based issues were also raised. Women also became an integral part of national political parties with all the major political parties establishing their women's wings. In the seventies, women began to take an active role in local movements. The anti-price rise agitation launched in Bombay in 1973, mobilized women of the city against inflation. The Nav Nirman movement, originally a student's movement in Gujarat against soaring prices, black marketing and corruption was soon joined by thousands of middle class women. The Chipko movement began in the small hilly town of Gopeshwar in Chamoli when representatives from a sports factory came to cut trees, and with their united strength prevented the contractor from cutting trees.

Among these was a campaign in 1985, in support of the Supreme Court judgment in a divorce case. Shah Bano had petitioned the Court for maintenance from her husband under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Act and the Court granted her demand. The government however, yielded to the demands of orthodox Muslims who protested against interference with their personal law, and introduced the Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights in Divorce) Bill denying Muslim women redress under Section 125. Over the years it has become clear that despite progressive laws and an enlightened judiciary, there is little will to challenge the status quo and take action that responds to the felt needs of oppressed womanhood.

At about the same time, the United Nations took the lead to gather countries on a single platform to discuss issues related to women and undertake joint actions to address their vulnerability. The first World Conference on the Status of Women was convened in Mexico City, 1975. Twenty years later, the Beijing Conference in 1995 reported that progress has been uneven and inequalities between women and men have persisted. And the Fifty-fifth session (2010-2011) report of the Commission on the Status of Women reaffirms the stand of the Beijing Conference thereby showing that 35 years and many conferences later, the work to achieve equal status for women remains unfinished.

Social Movements can be defined as forms of

collective action aimed at social reorganization. Does the Women's Movement in India qualify as a social movement by this definition? Did it lead to social reorganisation?

A closer look at history shows that the movement was not born out of the felt desires of Indian women. Women were encouraged to come out and join a freedom struggle in need of greater numbers. For the first time, a large number of women came out in public and participated in various campaigns such as the Civil Disobedience Movement, the Non-Cooperation Movement and the Quit India Movement. However they soon returned to the oppressive family fold as India gained freedom from colonial shackles, and only a few belonging to the urban, educated upper and middle classes continued to remain active in the public sphere. Nevertheless, the Freedom Movement had brought with it some very progressive rights, the attainment of which had taken quite long in the West, for example universal adult suffrage or the right to vote.

In the post-independence period, although the women's question dominated the discourse on development, there was little effort made to question or challenge the position of the women or the patriarchal structure. The eighties and nineties witnessed various campaigns protesting against issues like dowry, rape and sexual assault which raised the bar on society's accountability to the woman on the matter of her position and for the first time, challenged patriarchy as the basis for social structure. After the nineties, the Women's Movement has largely been subsumed under the rubric of development. Governments across the globe have taken cognizance of the need to address the vulnerability of women; and indicators identified and benchmarks defined to assess the development of women. However, none of the indicators challenges the core issue the position of women.

The message is clear. Progressive rights are an ideal to aspire to and work towards, but the situation of women in the family - the core unit of the patriarchal structure - is passive and subservient. Womanhood continues to be obedient and self-sacrificing. With the man as decision maker, the wife, daughter, sister does as she is told.

The Sexual Minority Movement

The discourse on alternate sexualities in India's public space has grown in volume, and in recent times, those who practice same sex relations have become more visible. A sub-population of MSM (kothi and others) experience life as the feminine gender. They face discrimination in the family, in the eyes of the law and in society at large for not conforming to conventional heterosexual behaviour and/or norms of gender identity. The powerful Indian family idealizes the heterosexual basis of marriage, and basic concepts of what it means to be masculine or feminine grow out of rigid convention. Men have shaped the world's ideas on women's roles in love, sex and the family. And since men are completely absent in a lesbian relationship, it is disregarded as a valid expression of sexuality.

The modern Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) liberation movement took off with the May 1968 events in Paris, the Binnenhof protest in Holland and the Stone Wall riot in New York in June 1969. Arguably, the most influential of these was the riot in the Stone Wall bar, in which drag queens and gay patrons fought the police in what was otherwise a routine case of police harassment in gay space. The event was honoured a year later with the first of the modern 'Pride' parades, employing the basic strategy of asserting visibility.

The news and effect of the international sexual minority movement of the West found an answering call from India in the eighties. The visible face of the LGBT community was that of Ashok Row Kavi. In many ways, it was the 'coming out' of this single individual in 1986, that provided the spark that lit the proverbial bonfire. He acted as an important catalyst for the growth of groups. In 1990, India's first gay and lesbian Magazine, Bombay Dost, made its debut. However, it would be wrong to think that homosexuality was absent from the public eye before 1990. Indeed, homosexuality was discussed in one form or the other on a range of platforms. As early as 1941, Ismat Chughtai's short story Lihaf (The Quilt), explored a lesbian relationship.

The early happenings within the movement in India were quite different from what had taken place in the West. In India, on one hand there was an attempt to

develop an ideological discourse around the issue; the other was simple collectivization in the form of safe places or support groups like Red Rose in Delhi, the Counsel Club in Kolkata or Good As You in Bangalore. The ideological discourse led to the initiation of movement to demand rights by the LGBT community as equal citizens of the country. In 1994, the AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan submitted the petition for the repeal of Section 377 in the Delhi High Court which took the view that coitus between individuals of the same sex was 'against the laws of nature'. In 1999, the first Pride March was organized in Kolkata. The march also called the 'Friendship Walk' was held in Kolkata mainly to raise the visibility of the sexual minority. But since 2008, Prides are very much associated with the repeal of the infamous Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. Coincidentally 10 years later, on the very date of the Friendship Walk, the Delhi High Court read down Section 377 and made consensual sex between same sex adults legal in India on 2nd July 2009.

The decade also witnessed the growth of community based organizations such as the Humsafar Trust. In the long term, such community based organizations proved to be the standard bearers for the community. Collectivization of the MSM took place largely through community based organizations which had become the new form and locus of activism doing everything from offering counselling and safe spaces to promoting safe and healthy sexual behaviour. It became clear over the first decade of the new millennium that a move had to be made toward a larger platform.

The formation of some organizations also contributed to the milestones to the movement in the nineties. For example, Sangama, an organization founded in 1999 focused on mobilizing sexual minorities to make them aware of their rights, then encouraging them to protest against discriminatory practices such as social exclusion, police harassment and blackmail by goons. Efforts also started to be made to air the concerns of Indian sexual minorities in international forums. Aditya Bondyopadhyay was the first gay individual to testify against the state supported oppression of sexual minorities before the UN Committee on Human Rights in Geneva in April 2002.