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Q18

'Women's movement in India has not addressed the issues of women of lower social strata.' Substantiate your view.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2018 · GS I · 15 marks · Women, Population and Urbanisation

Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

Core demand of the question

- Take the statement that India's women's movement has not addressed women of lower social strata
- Substantiate with history, then show where labouring and Dalit women did organise, and give a fair verdict

Revision summary

Nineteenth-century reform and much of the 1970s legal feminism were led by middle-class, upper-caste women.

Dowry, rape law, and civil code debates did not automatically cover land, wages, and caste violence.

Dalit, Adivasi, Muslim poor, and informal workers need a different core agenda.

SEWA, anti-arrack, peasant, and Dalit women's groups already organised those strata.

- **The fair view is:** mainstream gap, not total silence from below.

Flow diagram

Mainstream urban feminism -> Law family campus

Mainstream urban feminism -> Gap on caste land wages

SEWA anti-arrack Dalit groups -> Labour forest atrocity

Gap on caste land wages -> Need shared leadership

Labour forest atrocity -> Need shared leadership

Conclusion

- A living women's movement has to put land, equal wages, caste atrocity, forest rights, and informal-worker law beside family law, and it must share leadership with women of lower strata rather than speak about them.

The statement is substantially true of the elite and urban core of India's women's movement, which long treated lower-strata women as a later chapter. It is not true as a total history: labour, forest, anti-arrack, SEWA, and Dalit feminist organising did address those lives. The task is to make that second stream the centre, not a footnote.

Facts & figures

Towards Equality, 1974

Committee on the Status of Women in India report that reset the post-Emergency women's movement around data and law.

SEWA, 1972

Self Employed Women's Association, Ahmedabad, organising informal women workers for income and security.

Anti-arrack movement

Rural Andhra women's mobilisation in the early 1990s against arrack as a household and wage issue.

All India Women's Conference

Early twentieth-century body whose social base was largely educated and urban.

Dalit women's organisations, 1990s

Groups that argued caste and patriarchy join, against a single upper-caste 'woman' subject.

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