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Q5(e)

Women's role in the anti-arrack movement.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · PSIR GS 1 · 10 marks · Indian Nationalism

Indian Nationalism: Political Strategies of India's Freedom Struggle; Perspectives on Indian National Movement; Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru, Ambedkar, and the socialists.

Core demand of the question

- Locate the anti-arrack movement (10 marks)
- Show women's role in agitation, everyday politics, and the demand on the state
- Link to the claim that the personal is political
- Keep the note on the movement, not a general essay on feminism

Revision summary

The anti-arrack movement in Andhra Pradesh was a rural women's campaign against cheap liquor shops and their social effects.

Women picketed, used literacy networks, and made domestic violence and lost wages into a public issue.

The state was both target and accomplice because excise revenue and contractors were involved.

Governments responded with bans that were later weakened, showing both agenda power and structural limits.

The movement is a clear Indian illustration that household injury can become political action.

Introduction

The anti-arrack movement in Andhra Pradesh in the early 1990s was a mass campaign, led largely by rural women, against the sale and consumption of cheap liquor. It showed women as political actors in villages, not only as a vote bank. The household's injury became a public demand on the state.

Body**What women did**

Women in Nellore and then across districts organised pickets of arrack shops, burnt packets, held night vigils, and used literacy and sangham networks that had grown around adult education. They named domestic violence, wasted wages, and indebtedness as effects of a state-linked liquor economy. The demand was prohibition or strict control, and an end to the revenue logic that treated arrack as a fiscal good.

The movement entered party competition. Governments announced bans and later diluted them, which showed both the power of women's collective action and the limits of a demand that cut state revenue and contractor interest. **Pressure-group** politics here was not an urban lobby. It was neighbourhood organisation.

Political meaning

- **The episode illustrates that the personal is political:** the kitchen and the wage packet were already organised by excise policy. It also illustrates **Gramsci's civil society: women built a counter-common-sense against official development talk. Later women's reservation in panchayats after the 73rd Amendment** gave some of the same actors an institutional forum, including the Gram Sabha. The note should not claim a permanent prohibition victory. It should claim a permanent lesson: rural women can set the agenda of the state.

Flow diagram

Anti-arrack -> Rural women organise
Rural women organise -> Shops and state revenue
Rural women organise -> Household violence and wages
Anti-arrack -> Party and prohibition politics
Anti-arrack -> Later panchayat forums

Conclusion

Women's role in the anti-arrack movement was to organise, to name liquor as a public injury, and to force parties to respond. The movement politicised the household without waiting for permission from elite feminism. Its unfinished policy result does not cancel that political fact.

Facts & figures

Nellore, early 1990s

The agitation spread from Nellore district through women's groups linked to literacy and local organisation.

Excise-contractor nexus

Arrack was a source of state revenue and private profit, which is why a social demand became a conflict with government policy.

73rd Amendment

Later local government seats for women offered an institutional path related to the same rural public, including Gram Sabha debate on liquor and development.