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Q3(a)

Discuss the major recent social movements related to the physical rights of women in various countries of the world.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · PSIR GS 2 · 20 marks · Politics of Representation and Participation

Politics of Representation and Participation: Political parties, pressure groups and social movements in advanced industrial and developing societies.

Core demand of the question

- Define physical rights of women (body, safety, reproductive autonomy, freedom from violence)
- Survey major recent movements across regions with named cases
- Show what they achieved and where states reversed or stalled

Revision summary

Physical rights of women concern safety, reproduction and control of the body in public.

#MeToo, Ni Una Menos, India's post-Nirbhaya protests, Argentina's Green Tide, Poland's abortion strikes and Iran's Woman, Life, Freedom are major recent cases.

Gains include legal reform and public naming of violence; losses include U.S. abortion rollback and repression in Iran.

The wave is transnational in method and local in outcome.

Counter-movements are part of the same comparative story.

Introduction

Physical rights of women are rights in the body: safety from sexual and domestic violence, control over reproduction, freedom from forced dress and genital harm, and the right to be in public without assault. Recent years have seen large social movements on these claims in several countries. They are not one organisation. They are a comparable wave.

Body**Violence and public safety**

After the 2012 **Nirbhaya** case, Indian streets, campuses and later the legal debate on rape law showed a mass demand for bodily safety, still unfinished on marital rape and on conviction rates. **#MeToo** from 2017, beginning in the United States and travelling through media and workplaces in many countries, named sexual harassment as a public fact rather than a private shame. **Ni Una Menos** in Argentina and across Latin America made femicide a political crime, not a private tragedy. In **South Africa** and elsewhere, campus and township protests against rape repeated the same demand in a different social structure.

Reproductive body

The **Green Tide** in Argentina won a legal right to abortion in 2020 after years of street mobilisation, then influenced debate in parts of Latin America. **Poland's** near-total abortion restriction produced mass women's strikes. In the **United States**, the end of federal constitutional abortion protection in 2022 sent the fight back to states and to electoral politics, a reminder that movements can lose as well as win. These are physical-rights movements because they concern medical control of the female body.

Dress, morality police and theocratic control

In **Iran**, the death of **Mahsa (Jina) Amini** in 2022 and the **Woman, Life, Freedom** rising made hair, face and public presence a human-rights claim against compulsory hijab and the morality police. Related dissent over dress codes and guardianship appears in other West Asian settings. This is physical rights as **the state's hand on the body in the street**.

What 'major' and 'recent' means for PSIR

- **The comparative point is that** bodily autonomy **has become a transnational repertoire:** hashtags, strikes, green or violet colours, and legal reform campaigns. **Cynthia Enloe's** question 'where are the women?' is answered in the square, not only in the ministry. Success is uneven. Argentina's legislative win, India's partial criminal-law response, Iran's unfinished revolt, and the U.S. judicial reversal are four endings, not one.
- **Movements also meet** counter-movements: religious conservatism, party polarisation, and online harassment. Physical rights are therefore not a completed global norm. They are a live comparative conflict inside both democracies and autocracies.

Flow diagram

Physical rights -> Safety from violence
Physical rights -> Reproductive autonomy
Physical rights -> Dress and public body
Safety from violence -> MeToo Ni Una Menos Nirbhaya
Reproductive autonomy -> Green Tide Poland US
Dress and public body -> Iran Woman Life Freedom

Conclusion

Recent women's movements on rape, femicide, abortion and compulsory modesty are movements about the body in public and in law. They have changed statutes and speech in some countries and have been reversed or crushed in others. Comparative politics should treat them as a wave of physical-rights claims, not as a single happy ending.

Facts & figures

Nirbhaya 2012

Delhi gang-rape case that produced mass protest and Criminal Law (Amendment) changes on sexual violence.

Argentina 2020

Legalisation of abortion after the Green Tide mobilisations, a rare legislative win for reproductive rights.

Mahsa Amini 2022

Death in morality-police custody that triggered nationwide protest over compulsory hijab.

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