

Anti arrack movement in andhra pradesh history essay



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Arrack is low cost liquor that is generally consumed by poor people. The anti-arrack movement started as a spontaneous movement in a remote village in Dubagunta in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh in India. It was a women's movement which saw the articulation of the issue of family violence in a public forum. The movement questioned notions about the political apathy of suffering masses and inability of women to take initiatives on their own without men's help. It is through this movement that rural women in the state of Andhra Pradesh created history. The movement grew out of the awareness brought about by the literacy mission the National Literacy Mission (NLC) was officially launched in Nellore District in January 1990.

As a result of the mission mass-literacy campaigns being organized in the state, women often got together and discussed their problems. They found that all of them had a common problem at home- alcoholism. Together, they decided to take a stand against all those who sold the liquor that ruined their families' lives. But gradually they have risen suddenly in revolt against the local bureaucracy, police officials and the Chief Minister. They had a simple demand complete ban on selling of Arrack.

Liquor contractors have emerged as the most powerful people as they had resources and with political patronage gradually these contractors become politician. With earning from the sale of arrack they could bribe the police excise officials etc and maintain gang to people to dismantle any kind of agitation raised against them. After bribing officials whatever funds they had they invested in real estate, construction, finance and donations to cultural and religious institutions. The revenue of the government as excise duty

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from the sale of arrack was high it was Rs 390 million in 1970-71 that increased to Rs 8. 12 billion in 1991-92. This high revenue on part of government was a cause of government not doing anything substantial to stop the sale of arrack.

What was most surprising on the government's part was an official programme called Yarun Vahini allowed people to have liquor at their home in sachets that corroded the household economic condition.

In 1991-92, the average family income in the state of Andhra Pradesh was Rs 1, 840 per annum. Of this, Rs 830 was spent on liquor. Men were spending nearly 75 percent of their income on drinking. This figure itself indicates how much expenditure of a household was on arrack.

The lessons learnt from literacy mission classes helped women to come together. In many villages, women's committees were formed. They first tried to stop their husbands and other male relatives from drinking. But this was an onerous task so long as liquor was available in the village. Their fight now became a larger issue, involving the contractor, the excise department and the state itself who were rather were more powerful than these marginalized women.

The women wanted answer to why village is not having basic amenities like schools, drinking water proper wages but had regular arrack supply. The government on the other hand stated that the excise duty collected from the sale of arrack is used in welfare programmes like the subsidy on rice. The anti-arrack agitation started spreading, first through three districts-Nellore,

Chittoor and Kurnool. The women of Nellore district, however, were not
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convinced. While insisting that the arrack shops be closed, they said they would contribute a day's wages to help the government continue its welfare programs.

Here are some figures for comparison that what government generates from the sale of arrack and what it spends on welfare programme:

There were 341, 000 families entitled to draw subsidized rice at the rate of 16 kg per month.

The subsidy, at a rate of Rs 1. 50 per kilo rice, worked out to Rs 8. 2 million.

The government earned Rs 20 million from the sale of arrack.

In addition there were 540 shops of toddy and 200 shops of IMFL.

Thus, while the government spent Rs 1. 50 on every kilo of rice, it earned Rs 3. 50 through the sale of liquor.

Women faced police and the contractors without fear. There were reports of contractors offering money to villagers for their cooperation in reopening arrack shops. Amounts ranging from Rs 20 to Rs 2, 000 were offered. There were offers of bribes in the form of water schemes, schools and temples for their villages.

The women decided that they would each contribute one rupee so that the contractor did not suffer a financial loss, but they would not allow the arrack shops to be reopened in their villages. Soon 200 shops were shut down and

another 300 shops were partially closed till July 1992 during the course of the agitation.

The district magistrate at that time encouraged the women for the movement. He sent a proposal to the government seeking exemption from auction of arrack in the villages where the anti-arrack agitation was going on.

The contractors, who were not taking movement seriously, were worried they filed cases against the women and they also gave a memorandum to the government seeking reduction of costs payable by them to the government on sale of arrack. They filed a petition in the High Court making a case for the loss of their livelihood. The excise commissioner in turn sent a circular to the magistrate, asking the district administration to reopen all arrack shops.

In 1992, the Progressive Organization of Women (POW) and other Marxist-Leninist organizations took out a procession to protest against arrack auctions scheduled to be held that day at the A. C. Subba Reddy stadium. The right-wing party in opposition, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), organized another procession to the stadium. About 50, 000 people, 80 percent of them women, joined the procession. The BJP activists broke the police cordons and the police attacked the agitators with sticks. The disturbance ended only when the district magistrate promised to send their proposals to the government. On the other hand the contractors demanded protection from the government to continue their business and paying excise duty to the government.

This politicized the movement political parties in order to take advantage and increase their vote bank tried to be a part of it and support anti-arrack movement.

A non-governmental organization (NGO), Jagruti, based in Nellore, filed public-interest litigation, it contended promoting auctions violated the fundamental rights guaranteed in the constitution that majority of people particularly women of Nellore were against the sale of arrack. To support the case, it highlighted the fact that a prohibition campaign was already underway in 300 villages and more than 100, 000 people had submitted a memorandum to the district magistrate seeking cancellation of the arrack auction for that year. The repeated attempts to auction arrack were thwarted by women.

Women stated organizing them in committees one of the non-governmental organization (NGOs) in Chittoor, Jana Vignana Vedika, gave a call for a meeting in Tirupati to discuss the matter. This meeting, organized on 27 September 1992, witnessed a large gathering of women, youth and voluntary organizations. At this meeting, the district anti-arrack movement committee was formed, with 24 members from different voluntary organizations and women's organizations. The ultimate objective was to demand total prohibition. The committee organized many meetings and discussion forums to discuss the movement and to lead it in a peaceful and progressive way. Letters to chief minister and prime minister were sent with a request for the ban of arrack.

Interestingly, there was no organized leadership to start within the anti-arrack movement. Most of the work was done with local initiative. Political parties entered at the very last stage. Leadership was offered by many NGOs, women's associations and individual women. But here too the initiative came from local women. Most of the activities were planned and implemented by the women, be it canvassing, patrolling at night, organizing processions, stopping men from drinking and burning of liquor sachets.

In the initial phases, it was women from the lower sections of society, mostly the most-oppressed sections, who were involved in the movement. But soon, women from upper castes also joined that further strengthened the movement. Women came forward as a unit for the common cause.

The women collectively devised their own methods of imposing fines or punishing violators they organized street play and drams to portray ill effects of arrack consumption.

Newspapers also played a very important role in popularizing this movement. The Telugu newspaper Eenadu dedicated two pages everyday to cover each and every aspect of this movement.

With the movement gathering momentum in three districts Nellore, Chittoor and Kurnool and its surrounding areas, Hyderabad, the capital of the state of Andhra Pradesh, became a meeting point for all the groups in the districts. Finally, the government had to bow to pressure and ban arrack from 1 October 1993.

Excise department was entrusted the job of preventing smuggling arrack from neighboring states. In order to create awareness among the people, the Information Department launched a massive publicity campaign against liquor. Huge cut-outs against drinking were to be seen all over the city. Banning of arrack was not effective as the consumption of toddy increased. So what was needed was total prohibition on sale.

Renuka Chowdhary of the Telugu Desam Party, then the opposition party in the state, and other women's organizations called for a meeting of all women fighting against arrack to form a common platform. And thus a Joint Action Forum of women was formed to press for 'total prohibition' and a memorandum seeking prohibition was submitted to the Chief Minister.

When the response from chief minister was not satisfactory, they decided to collect signatures, arrange meetings in the slums, and organize rallies, marches and picketing. At a rally on 2nd October 1994, N. T Rama Rao of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) proclaimed that if his party was elected to power he would declare total prohibition. Elections to the state assembly were held in December and the TDP was elected to power with a thumping majority.

In the beginning, the political parties were a bit wary of this commitment made by Rama Rao as it was the same N. T. Rama Rao who had introduced the Yarun Vahini scheme, making liquor available in people's homes by selling it in sachets, now emerged as a leader to demand prohibition. In fact, each and every political party from Right to Center to Left, be it the Telugu Desam Party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Communist Party of India or the

Communist Party of India (Marxist), made prohibition an issue during the elections. The women had achieved their victory.

The ban on arrack ended the first phase of the movement. Soon, because of the gap in liquor laws, a second phase of struggle followed, which resulted in the declaration of total prohibition. After prohibition came into effect, the state government promulgated an ordinance amending the Andhra Pradesh Excise Act to make the manufacture of liquor illegal and punishable with conviction and fines up to Rs 100, 000. This movement went a long way towards awakening self-confidence and a sense of power in women.

Collective action problem:

Here the collective action problem is:

The lack of resources with the women who are being united for the movement, the women who were in movement were generally women from marginalized class and they had more powerful people to deal with like the state and the arrack contractors who were far better off than them.

In a male dominated society it becomes really tough for the women to come together and raise their voice initially it was difficult but later on women freely came forward to raise their voice.

The government which is a caretaker cannot stop the sale of arrack at the because of the revenue it is generating it will affect its welfare activities that is being carried out.

Sometimes the officials are also getting bribe to let them carry these activities and political parties get assistance in form of grants to contest elections that further leads to inaction on the government's part.

Here in the above mentioned case the following theories of collective behavior can be observed:

Contagion theory: Contagion theory is basically where intense feeling and behavior at variance with usual predisposition are induced among the members. It states how people in collectives come to behave uniformly, intensely and at variance with their usual patterns. Here women forming collective are behaving to fight for a common cause that is the ban of arrack sale they can't do it individually but they have to come together for the cause. Unanimity and intensity comes because of circular reaction as behavior of one woman influences the other and it acts as stimulation for the action.

Convergence theory: Convergence theory basically comes into play when person who have same predispositions come together and this predisposition are activated by the event or object toward which their common attention is directed. Here the women had a common problem of alcoholism and they had to tackle it together they mainly belonged to marginalized class of women and that helped them come together for collective action.

About the movement:

The movement had characteristics of social movement as it mobilized the women involved in it to struggle for a specific goal and objectives. Here the

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goal to be achieved was the ban on sale of arrack and women as a whole participated for the cause.

Here the strategy and tactics of movement at mobilization phase was on collective action there were demonstrations to government officials, ministers' etc. agitations that involved arguing with shop owners, snatching away liquor sachets etc. The main emphasis was on to communicate the ideology to the people.

When it was institutionalized by involvement of NGO, political parties, women associations and other parties, the main emphasis was on interest articulation of the movement for example it was the NGO that filed public interest litigation of the behalf of the movement and submitted memorandum to the district magistrate seeking cancellation of the arrack auction for that year, the NGOs further encouraged women to form committees to discuss their interests and communicate them to the government and other parties. The political party involved also submitted memorandum to chief minister.