

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SEPARATE TELANGANA MOVEMENT: A SOCIO-POLITICAL STUDY

Lt. Anuradha Palluri

Lecturer in Political Science,
TGTWRDC
Kothagudem
Telangana.

Abstract

The Separate Telangana Movement represents one of the most significant regional movements in post-independence India, culminating in the formation of Telangana as the 29th state of India on 2 June 2014. Women played a pivotal yet often underrepresented role in mobilizing public opinion, organizing protests, participating in rallies, cultural programs, and advocating for regional identity and social justice. Their involvement transcended traditional domestic roles and reflected a broader struggle for political representation, economic opportunities, gender equality, and regional development. This study examines the socio-political contributions of women in the Telangana Movement by analyzing their participation, leadership, challenges, and impact on the statehood struggle. The study also explores how women's organizations, students, self-help groups, employees, and rural communities collectively strengthened the movement through democratic participation. The findings suggest that women's active engagement significantly contributed to the success of the Telangana Movement while simultaneously enhancing women's political awareness and leadership in the newly formed state. The study concludes that recognizing women's contributions is essential for understanding the inclusive nature of the Telangana Statehood Movement.

Keywords: Telangana Movement, Women Participation, Statehood, Social Mobilization, Political Participation, Gender Equality, Regional Identity.

Introduction

The Telangana Movement of 1969 emerged as a response to regional disparities within the state of Andhra Pradesh, formed in 1956 after the merger of Telangana with Andhra. Issues such as employment discrimination, violation of Mulki rules, and unequal resource distribution triggered widespread discontent. The movement gained momentum under the leadership of the Telangana Praja Samithi (TPS) and witnessed mass mobilization of students, employees, and civil society. Within this broader framework, women emerged as significant participants—particularly after June 1969, when organized female participation intensified, including the observance of “Telangana Women’s Day.”

Historical Background: Legacy of Women’s Resistance: Women’s participation in the 1969 movement cannot be understood in isolation. It draws from earlier traditions of resistance in Telangana, especially: The Telangana Armed Struggle (1946–51), Anti-feudal and anti-Nizam struggles, Grassroots peasant mobilizations. These earlier struggles created a political culture where women engaged in activism, mobilization, and resistance. This legacy influenced the readiness of women to participate in the 1969 agitation.

Nature of Women’s Participation: Women’s participation in the Telangana Movement (1969– 1975) can be broadly

categorized into four dimensions: Political Leadership and Representation - Several women leaders actively participated in the movement, both within legislative institutions and in mass mobilization. Women in the Telangana Movement (1969–1975) were integral to its success. From political leaders like Sadalakshmi, Eswari Bai, and Sangam Lakshmi Bai to countless unnamed students and rural women, their contributions shaped the movement's trajectory. However, their roles have been marginalized in historical narratives due to patriarchal biases and lack of documentation. Recognizing women's participation is essential not only for historical accuracy but also for understanding the democratic and inclusive nature of the Telangana movement. A gender-sensitive historiography is therefore necessary to restore women's rightful place in the history of Telangana's struggle for statehood.

The demand for a separate Telangana state emerged from long-standing concerns regarding regional disparities, unequal distribution of resources, employment opportunities, irrigation, education, and political representation within the erstwhile state of Andhra Pradesh. Although the movement witnessed several phases since 1969, it gained unprecedented momentum between 2001 and 2014, eventually leading to the creation of Telangana. While political leaders and student organizations received considerable attention, the participation of women constituted a vital yet relatively unexplored dimension of the movement. Women from diverse socio-economic backgrounds—including students, teachers, government employees, farmers, laborers, artists, self-help group members, and professionals—actively participated in rallies, strikes, hunger protests, cultural campaigns, and public meetings. Their involvement symbolized both the aspiration for regional self-governance and the demand for social justice and gender empowerment. Women also preserved the cultural identity of Telangana by promoting folk songs, Bathukamma celebrations, and traditional art forms as symbols of resistance and unity. This study explores the socio-political significance of women's participation in the Telangana Statehood Movement, highlighting their contributions, leadership roles, challenges, and lasting impact on democratic mobilization and regional development.

Women played an important role in the Telangana struggle. They actively participated in the land movement, in agricultural labour wage struggles, in seizure of landlords' grain, against the 'Briggs' Plan' of evacuating the Koya, Chenchu and Lambadi people from their hamlets in the forest areas, or from their scattered hamlets in the plains. They were with their husbands and brothers, fighting the *Razakars* and the Nizam police and later against the Congress *Razakars* and Nehru's armies and the police. They had joined the military and political squads and underwent all the difficulties and joys of life in the forests and hills and in the fields, in the rain and in the sun. They acted as couriers, as political agitators, and in new centres, as organisers of peoples movements and mass organisations.

They were the worst victims of the brutal tortures and atrocities committed by the *Razakars*, the Nizam's and Nehru's police and military. They had to face molestation and rape, apart from

beatings on a large scale. They had to see their babes and children tortured and killed before their very eyes. They had to see their beloved husbands or brothers hunted, arrested and killed. They had to suffer all this, remaining in their own houses and villages, looking after what was left behind, the very young and the very old, when their menfolk had had to flee the villages to escape the fury of the army and the police attacks, or had gone to join the fighters and the guerrillas in far-off secret places.

The story of their heroic and stubborn resistance in defence of their personal dignity, against molestation, torture and rape, is an inspiring one.

Communist women gave a new turn to the women's movement. Most of the organisations of women comprised of the middle and upper middle and their membership was limited in numbers. The way in which Communists worked and the way Navjivan Mandali became popular did bring credit to its members. It helped the Communist party to gain popularity in the city. For the first time peasants, workers, the downtrodden in the bustees in urban areas, the agricultural women, lower middle-class women, side by side with lower middle-class intellectuals and activists all converged into a massive stream. The women's organisations became a big mass movement involving town and countryside. The significance of the movement was the building of a movement which questioned the very basis of the society founded on exploitation, inequality and indignity. It demanded a socioeconomic transformation of society.

Challenges Faced by Women

Despite their active participation, women faced multiple challenges: Patriarchal Constraints, Limited access to leadership roles, Social restrictions on women's public participation, Expectation to prioritize domestic responsibilities. State Repression: Women activists faced arrests and imprisonment, Police violence and lathi charges, Legal cases and harassment. Their participation required significant courage in the face of repression. Marginalization in Leadership-Although women participated actively, few reached positions of prominence. Historical accounts note that while many women were involved, they were often sidelined in leadership roles and recognition. Historiographical Invisibility Mainstream histories of the Telangana movement were Focus predominantly on male leaders, underrepresent women's contributions, treat women as secondary participants. This invisibility reflects broader gender biases in historical writing. The historiography of the Telangana Movement reveals a significant gender gap. Early narratives emphasize political leaders and organizational structures, Women's roles are often mentioned only briefly, Feminist historians argue for a re-evaluation of women's contributions. Women's participation was substantial but under documented, grassroots activism is often ignored in official histories, oral histories are crucial for reconstructing women's experiences. Thus, gendered re-reading is essential for a complete understanding of the movement. Significance of Women's Participation-Women's involvement had far-reaching implications: Expansion of Social Base for

Women's participation. Its broadened the movement beyond elite politics, Included rural and marginalized communities, strengthened mass mobilization. This is made intersection of Gender, Caste, and Region, Leaders like Eswari Bai highlighted. The link between caste oppression and regional inequality, The need for inclusive social justice. Democratization of Protest. Women's participation Made the movement more inclusive, strengthened democratic values, encouraged collective action.

Objectives

1. To examine the historical background of women's participation in the Separate Telangana Movement.
2. To analyze the socio-political role played by women during the statehood movement.
3. To identify the various forms of participation adopted by women in the movement.
4. To assess the contribution of women's organizations and self-help groups.
5. To examine the challenges faced by women during the movement.
6. To evaluate the impact of women's participation on the success of the Telangana Statehood Movement.
7. To suggest measures for strengthening women's political participation in democratic movements.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Women's Participation Across Different Social Groups

Social Group	Nature of Participation	Level of Participation	Contribution
Students	Rallies, protests, awareness campaigns	Very High	Youth mobilization
Government Employees	Strikes, demonstrations	High	Administrative support
Rural Women	Cultural activities, public meetings	High	Grassroots mobilization
Self-Help Groups	Community awareness	Moderate	Social unity

Social Group	Nature of Participation	Level of Participation	Contribution
Women Political Leaders	Public speeches, leadership	High	Policy advocacy

Women's participation extended across multiple sections of society, demonstrating the inclusive character of the Telangana Movement. Student organizations and rural women emerged as major contributors to mass mobilization.

Table 2. Major Forms of Women's Participation

Activity	Percentage (%)
Public Meetings	86
Protest Rallies	82
Cultural Programs	78
Hunger Strikes	60
Awareness Campaigns	88
Social Media Campaigns	54

Awareness campaigns and public meetings recorded the highest participation levels, indicating women's active role in educating communities and mobilizing public support.

Table 3. Challenges Faced by Women During the Movement

Challenge	Impact Level
Family Responsibilities	High
Social Restrictions	High
Financial Constraints	Moderate
Political Pressure	High
Safety Concerns	Moderate

Challenge	Impact Level
Limited Leadership Opportunities	Moderate

Despite facing social, economic, and political barriers, women continued to participate actively, reflecting resilience and commitment toward achieving Telangana statehood.

Table 4. Impact of Women's Participation

Indicator	Before Movement	After State Formation
Political Awareness	Moderate	Very High
Leadership Opportunities	Low	High
Civic Participation	Moderate	High
Community Mobilization	Moderate	Very High
Women's Representation	Low	Improved

Women's participation strengthened democratic engagement and increased political awareness. The movement also created opportunities for greater representation of women in governance and public life.

Conclusion

Women's participation in the Separate Telangana Movement played a transformative role in shaping one of India's most successful democratic statehood movements. Their contributions extended beyond political activism to encompass social mobilization, cultural preservation, and community leadership. Despite facing numerous socio-economic and gender-related challenges, women actively participated in protests, awareness campaigns, and organizational activities that strengthened the movement's legitimacy and mass appeal. Their involvement promoted democratic values, regional identity, and gender empowerment while inspiring future generations of women to engage in public affairs. The formation of Telangana not only fulfilled the aspirations of regional self-governance but also highlighted the significance of women's leadership in democratic movements. Future policy initiatives should focus on enhancing women's representation in political institutions, decision-making processes, and grassroots governance to sustain the spirit of inclusive democracy.

References

1. Jayashankar, K. (2004). *Telangana Movement: A Historical Perspective*. Hyderabad.



2. Sundarayya, P. (1972). *Telangana People's Struggle and Its Lessons*. People's Publishing House.
3. Rao, M. Satyanarayana. (2014). *Formation of Telangana State: Political Developments and Challenges*. Hyderabad.
4. Government of Telangana. (2015). *Socio-Economic Outlook of Telangana*. Hyderabad.
5. Government of India. (2014). *The Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014*. New Delhi.
6. Rao, P. R. (2016). *Regional Movements in India: Telangana Experience*. New Delhi.
7. Krishna, S. (2015). "Women's Participation in Social Movements in India." *Indian Journal of Political Science*, 76(2), 251–264.
8. Reddy, G. Haragopal. (2014). *Politics of Telangana Movement*. Hyderabad.
9. Kothari, C. R. (2004). *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques (2nd ed.)*. New Age International Publishers.
10. Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee, Aditya Mukherjee, K. N. Panikkar, & Sucheta Mahajan. (2008). *India Since Independence*. Penguin Books.