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FROM GRASSROOTS FEMINIST MOBILIZATION TO POLICY CHANGE: THE ANTI-ARRACK WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN ANDHRA PRADESH, INDIA (1992)

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ABSTRACT

The Anti-Arrack Movement of early 1990s Andhra Pradesh is a compelling case of grassroots feminist mobilization translating into substantive policy change. Spearheaded by rural women across caste and class divisions, the movement arose in response to the devastating socioeconomic impacts of rampant alcohol consumption — from crippled family incomes to intensified domestic violence — even as the state enriched itself on arrack excise revenues. Drawing on historical accounts, this paper traces how women's shared experiences of deprivation and abuse coalesced into a sustained public campaign that forced the state to ban arrack in 1993 (and adopt total prohibition by 1995). Situating the Anti-Arrack agitation within a broader context of bottom-up governance reform, the study illustrates how non-elite actors can reshape state priorities through persistent civic action. The movement's evolution from localized, literacy-driven awakening to state-wide protests (marches, sit-ins, and media campaigns) underscores the agency of marginalized women in reconfiguring state-citizen relations. Ultimately, the movement's trajectory offers vital insights into how collective action from the grassroots can disrupt entrenched power structures and redefine the very agenda of development.

Keywords: Anti-Arrack, Women's Movements, Feminist, Anti-Liquor

1. INTRODUCTION

Social movements in the late 20th century have dramatically reshaped governance and rights across the globe. With the rise of "new social movements" in the 1960s and beyond, marginalized groups began mobilizing around issues of identity, welfare, and justice – often outside traditional class-based politics. Feminist perspectives within this scholarship note that gender oppression intersects with other inequalities, meaning women's collective actions can catalyze unique forms of change. The Anti-Arrack movement of early 1990s Andhra Pradesh stands out as one of India's most significant women-led movements, bringing together thousands of rural women across caste, class, and religious divides in a unified struggle. What makes this Movement remarkable is that it moved women's grievances from the private sphere to the public domain: domestic agony over alcoholic abuse transformed into organized activism confronting bootleggers, local strongmen, and apathetic officials. In doing so, the Anti-Arrack agitation epitomizes the essential elements of social change identified by scholars like Mario Diani (1992) – an informal grassroots network, a shared collective identity, and

contentious action to challenge the status quo. Accordingly, this paper argues that the Anti-Arrack movement demonstrates how marginalized women's collective agency can challenge entrenched state interests and redefine development priorities.

To understand the stakes of this Movement, one must grasp the centrality of the liquor economy in Andhra Pradesh and India more broadly. The liquor industry is one of the most profit-generating businesses in the world, and in India alcohol excise taxes form an integral component of state revenues. Apart from Bihar, Gujarat, Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur, where liquor is absolutely prohibited, revenue from alcohol is a major contributor to the state exchequer. Excise taxes on alcohol provide most of the state excise tax revenues that, in turn, account for more than 10 per cent of state own-tax revenues in 11 out of the 15 states for which data could be obtained. (Mahal, 2000). According to a study published in The Lancet Journal in 2019, which measured per capita alcohol consumption of 189 countries using data from the WHO and the Global Burden of Disease study, India's annual alcohol intake increased by 38 percent between 2010 and 2017 and the total volume of alcohol consumed globally per year has risen by 70 percent since 1990 (India's alcohol intake up by 38% in seven years: Lancet Study, 2019)

The early British policy relating to liquor consumption, which was also interlinked with excise revenue, was one of temperance and of restricting the consumption of intoxicating drinks. In 1930-31 and 1932-34, as a part of the civil disobedience movement, there was picketing of liquor shops and toddy booths. The enforcement of complete prohibition figured as the first item in the national demands submitted by Gandhiji to the British Government in 1931. Later, when provinces like Bombay and Madras started implementing prohibition policy in stages, the outbreak of the Second World War disrupted the whole process. During this time, the ban on liquor sales was lifted in all the states, and revenues from excise soared high. Liquor revenue came to the fore when revenue from excise (an indirect tax), became the single largest source of income, bypassing the land revenue (a direct property-based tax). (Reddy & Patnaik, 1993)

Thus, we see the trend of consumption in the liquor economy as ever-growing and policies around it as ever-changing. This is primarily a consequence of the fact that alcohol policy comes under the legislative power of individual states (Directive Principles of State Policy) and not the central government. Hence, while looking at the liquor regulation in India, it is crucial to note that there are considerable inter-state variations that have existed in policy measures, such as the legal minimum age for purchase of liquor, prohibition, and taxes on alcohol. Finally, Indian states also differ greatly in terms of their tax policies towards alcohol, whether in terms of excise taxes (the power to levy excise taxes on alcohol has been specifically granted to states under the Indian Constitution) and sales taxes.

This paper looks at the Anti-Arrack Movement in Andhra Pradesh in the 1990s and how it grew from a local women-led protest into a powerful force that pushed the State towards changing its liquor policy. It closely follows the journey of rural women, who, despite having little to no background in political activism, came together to fight the everyday violence and economic hardships that alcohol had brought into their lives. At the same time, it examines how the State, heavily dependent on the revenue from arrack sales, struggled to respond to this growing movement. By tracing how women's collective actions forced the State to rethink its priorities, the paper shows how the movement not only questioned the idea of development being tied to excise revenue but also brought forward a new understanding of development — one that came from the voices of those who were most affected. In doing so, it brings out the contrast between the State's financial interests and the women's fight to reclaim their families and communities from the grip of alcohol.

1.1. THE ANTI-ARRACK MOVEMENT IN ANDHRA PRADESH (1992)

The Anti-Arrack movement was one of the most significant women's movements in India, which brought together thousands of women from multiple districts of a state together, irrespective of caste, class and religion, to uphold their values of sisterhood as a collective and fight through their domestic agonies stemming from arrack.

1.2. BACKGROUND AND DISCOURSES AROUND DEVELOPMENT

The Anti-Arrack Movement in Andhra Pradesh started in Dubagunta village of the Nellore district. Most of the families in the village were agricultural labourers, and it was also their primary source of income. The caste system was fairly rigid, as caste-wise drinking was a taboo. (Reddy & Patnaik, 1993) Women in the Telangana region also drank liquor but stuck mainly to toddy. According to the village council, 90 percent of men in Dubagunta village were alcoholics during 1988-92. The problem of alcoholism had given a steep rise to domestic violence, violence against children, poverty

and malnutrition. The problem had, over time, become so perpetual that other villages would not marry their daughters off to the men in Dubagunta.

The liquor trade, which was considered a social stigma up until the late 60s and associated mostly with bootleggers, the criminal and anti-social elements, had started acquiring political respectability with the growing dependence of the political elite on the money and muscle power of the liquor traders. (Reddy & Patnaik, 1993) In the past two decades, liquor contractors had emerged as the most powerful people in Andhra Pradesh. With political benefaction, soon these contractors became politicians. They started hiring goons and criminals to maintain their power monopoly in the liquor market from tribals, bootleggers and rival contractors. Moreover, the auction system in arrack and toddy, the rivalry in illicit distilling of arrack and smuggling of IML to avoid excise gave rise to the maintenance of criminal gangs by the liquor contractors. There were three ferocious landlord contractors in the area that emerged - Baireddy Rajashekhar Reddy, Budda Vengal Reddy and Mohamnmad Zilani. The area between Kurnool and Srishailam is 'their sanctuary'. The state machinery at the district level was reduced to such a farce that in the presence of the landlords, the officials could do nothing but shiver. (Ilaiah, 1992)

A good deal of earnings was used to bribe police and excise officials to steer them away. Rest was used to dominate the socio-cultural life of the communities. Soon, in what seemed to be a deliberate and conscious effort, the Government too started promoting local liquors. With the introduction of the Varun Vahini programme (1986) by the then Telugu Desam Party's leader, N T Rama Rao, the liquor shops, which were earlier located on the outskirts of the village, arrack started to be directly distributed to homes in sachets of 90 ml and 45 ml ensuring that alcoholics had a very easy supply of it, being delivered to them at their doorstep. The introduction of sachets made a mockery of the very concept of a 'shop' and the rental in relation to shops. The excise duty in absolute terms increased almost six times from the 70s from INR 35 crores in 1971-72 to INR 839 crores by 1991-92. Something to note here is that 70 to 80 percent of the growing excise was accounted for by the revenue from arrack - the poor people's drink. This heavy dependence on arrack revenue meant that any serious anti-liquor agitation would challenge not only social norms but also significant state financial interests, setting the stage for a confrontation between grassroots welfare and government coffers. (Reddy & Patnaik, 1993)

Moreover, the increasing arrack consumption was soon accompanied by the increasing price of arrack. Then, the price at which the State issued arrack to the contractor was INR 10.50 per litre. The 'issue prices' included the cost, excise duty, transport charges, and bottling charges. The price at which the contractor sells to the consumer in sachets of 90 ml and 45 ml or bottles of 180 ml worked out to INR 50 to 60 per litre, i.e., the difference between the sale price and the 'issue price' worked out to INR 40 to INR 50 per litre out of which the contractors have to meet the rentals which amount to about two-thirds of the total excise revenue. (Reddy & Patnaik, 1993). In Andhra Pradesh, the excise revenue has been much higher in comparison to all the other states in India. By 1990-91, Andhra Pradesh occupied the first rank in the country in arrack consumption with 111 million litres per annum (Brughubanda, n.d.). Clearly, the corruption in the entire business was rigidly systemic and structured at every step.

Consequently, the family economy crippled. In 1991-92, the average family income in the State of Andhra Pradesh was INR 1,840 per annum. Of this, INR 830 was spent on liquor. Men were spending nearly 75 percent of their income on drinking (Pande, 2000). Women were the worst affected. They lost husbands, fathers and brothers to alcoholism. As they went out to work as daily wage earners, their earnings were still in the control of the male of the family, who conveniently spent most of it on liquor. They sold off their sarees, jewellery, cattle, etc., to fulfil everyday needs. All women complained of similar happenings. Men stopped going to work, subjected the women and children to extreme violence and even demanded full-fledged meals called 'neesu', which constituted mutton and fish, which they could clearly not afford. Levels of poverty and illiteracy grew rapidly in nearby districts. Furthermore, the policies of the Government diminished their wage structure and abolished the subsidized rice scheme. As women became more afflicted and defenceless, their anger and frustration were naturally directed to arrack as they saw drinking as the root cause of all of their miseries.

1.3. EMERGENCE OF THE MOVEMENT AND CONFRONTATION WITH THE STATE

The Movement grew out of the awareness created by the National Literacy Mission (NLM) undertaken by the Government of India under Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1988 to eradicate illiteracy. In January 1990, as the Akshara Jyoti Programme supported by the State and CPI(M) reached the village, some senior officials organized a meeting with

the women to discuss the campaign. When some drunk men interrupted the meeting and called literacy useless for women, they were shooed off, but that triggered a strong motivation to attend classes. In that moment, the women realized that ignorance was being used as a tool to control them – sparking a determination to become literate and change their situation.

As the classes started, they seemed to be strategically targeted towards making them aware of their alcoholism condition. The literacy classes did more than teach the alphabet – they became forums for conscientization, a process through which the women began critically analyzing the causes of their suffering. Organizers introduced didactic stories like the "Seeta Katha", in which Seeta, a humble wife, commits suicide after she fails to reform her husband's drinking habits. After in-depth discussions on the story, as more women discussed about their day-to-day problems, they figured out that the drinking problem was the very basic of all. They organized themselves and managed to close down the shop in the village.

2. EVOLUTION INTO A MOVEMENT

With their newly found courage and power, the women decided to launch a full-fledged action. Seeing education as a significant precipitator for collectiveness, women started attending classes with more vigour. They further learnt 'Adavallu Ekamaithe' (If Women Unite). Together, the women marched in hundreds and stopped a toddy cart from entering the village, even threatening the arrack delivery truck driver. Due to this, no one participated in the arrack auction that year. This gave them their first taste of success. As more committees formed and their organization got structured, their fight now became a larger issue involving the contractor, the excise department and the State itself.

The movement spread to the districts of Kurnool, Chittoor and Kurnool. As negotiations with the State began, the most prominent hurdle was the huge amount of revenue this business generated, which in turn ran the welfare schemes. To this, the women collectively offered to contribute a day's wage to the scheme, but even this generous gesture paled in comparison to the magnitude of liquor revenues, highlighting the David-versus-Goliath nature of their fight. But women started rigorous movements in various parts of the State. While advocating the closure of arrack shops, they started fighting the armed henchmen and goons hired by the contractors. By July 1992, about 500 shops were nearly closed. This rapid success in multiple districts was driven by the women's sheer persistence and community support – their ability to mobilize en masse created economic disruption (empty auctions, closed shops) that authorities could not ignore. The then District Magistrate took note of the popular momentum and became sympathetic to the cause - proposing an exemption in that year's arrack auction. This illustrated how grassroots pressure can win intermediary allies within the state apparatus.

Instances of state repression were also frequently reported. Police beating literacy program volunteers, abusing women who participated in the movement, and arresting and booking cases against them came to the forefront. They were attacked physically. But what actually worried the women more was that their agitation involved a lot of travel outside the village, which meant a loss of time and labour as well as lesser attention to their children and elderly.

But the movement had gained momentum. The local contractors and politicians submitted a memorandum to the Government seeking a reduction in the costs of the revenue from the sale of arrack, stating a loss of livelihood due to this agitation. The District Administration was immediately ordered to re-open all arrack shops. In response, the Progressive Organization of Women (POW) organized a procession against the arrack auction. About 50,000 people, out of which 80 percent were women, joined it. The Bhartiya Janta Party's (BJP) activists broke the police cordons, triggering a lathi charge on the participants.

Amid all this chaos, an NGO called Jagruti, based in Nellore, filed a public-interest writ litigation. It was contended that the sale of liquor by the government, even with regulatory measures, violated the fundamental rights guaranteed in the Constitution, especially since the majority of the people, particularly women in Nellore, were against its consumption. But all in vain. The Supreme Court scheduled for the auction on 26th September 1992. Thousands of women gathered to prevent the auction. But as violence broke out, the auction was postponed indefinitely. The women's direct action thus succeeded in stalling the state's plans, at least temporarily, and kept the issue in the public eye.

But the administration refused to listen to their demands. As several gatherings happened across the State and then the country, a lot was being done to gain the attention of the Ministers of the State and the Centre. Women collectively performed marches, meetings, and discussions everywhere. NGOs, organizations, and women from all across joined the

movement. Many meetings and sit-in protests were held, and a steady awareness campaign was built against arrack. Finally, the Government had to bow to pressure and ban arrack from 1st October 1993.

2.1. MOBILIZATION STRATEGIES AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Despite an absence of clear leadership in the movement, the women were united with a common goal of abolishing alcoholism in their village. Many NGOs, women's associations, and individual women have offered support, expertise, and leadership. One of the prominent names was Vardhineni Rosamma – a neo-literate village woman who emerged as an early leader and proof of how education empowered the protestors (Anti-liquor activist Dubagunta Rosamma no more, 2016).

Taylor and Whittier (Taylor & Whittier, 1992) argue that collective identity formation in social movements is by nature oppositional to dominant cultural practices. This oppositional aspect of collective identity formation applies to movements seeking to 'resist or restructure existing systems of domination. The participating women were aware of the enemy here, the State, goons and liquor. The only thread binding them all together was their frustration against them and a vision of a better household. In other words, the women constructed a collective identity around being sufferers-turned-resisters: their shared oppression as wives and mothers of alcoholics became the basis of unity in their sisterhood and action. This oppositional identity – defining themselves in contrast to drunken husbands, abusive contractors, and complicit officials – was crucial in sustaining the movement.

'Nukkad Nataks' portrayed how the consumption of arrack has led to the rise in crime and poverty rates in rural areas. They also showed how the arrack counters were managed by political leaders or people who were close cohorts of political leaders and the police. Some plays also tried to show how these local contractors tried to disengage and divide the people involved in the anti-arrack movement. Age-old dramas were revived to promote the message of a liquor-free society. The most important among them was Madhuseva, written by Kallakuri Narayana Rao in 1926, during the days of the National Movement when the slogan 'Avoid toddy and open your eyes' was very popular in Andhra Pradesh. It dealt with the theme of how the consumption of liquor was detrimental to health and led to the ruination of a family and its property. One of the songs adopted for the movement (translated in English) was:

Saara babus (liquor contractors) we salute you.
Ruling ministers, we pray, listen.
We don't want saara, that spoils our liver that ruins our homes.
Saara babus we salute you...
What should I tell you about saara, sister,
what should I tell about my husband.
The whole day's labor goes for buying saara packets.
No cloth to cover my body, no medicine to treat my son.
The heart is burning, the stomach is starving,
but my husband's mouth is filled with saara...
Listen and see my sister.
Look at saara, look at its power.
It spoils your evergreen families and burns your homes...
Sister, listen, oh brothers, listen.
You should all come forward to stop saara.
Chase saara away and mend your family.
Shout that we shouldn't have saara and it shouldn't be in the village...
Each and every village spread the message of quitting saara.
Each and every mother's heart will speak of its abolition
Each and every woman should agitate and it should be written in the annals of Indian history.
(Pande, 2000)

Many slogans, such as the following, were also raised during the movement –

'The labour of the poor should not be sacrificed for arrack.'

'Build a tomb for this dangerous liquor'

'Liquor is dangerous for your life, brother'

'Please keep away from this habit'

'Forget liquor, shape your family'

'Friendship with liquor is a step to death'

'The house where no one drinks, is a house full of flowers of joy.

'We don't want arrack in our village'.

Through these creative forms of protest, the movement built a broad-based solidarity. The plays and songs spread awareness even among the illiterate, stirring emotions by linking alcohol to ruined homes and urging communal action. Slogans coined in simple language became shared mantras that unified women from different villages. These tactics also appealed to the moral sensibilities of onlookers, helping garner sympathy from the broader public and the press.

Regional media thus acted as a movement ally, amplifying the women's voices and framing the issue as a moral and social crisis. Newspapers, especially 'Eenadu' played a very important role in popularizing this movement – expanding a local struggle into a state-wide call for reform. The Telugu newspaper committed two pages every day to cover each and every aspect and detail of this movement. They named the section "Saara pai samaram" (The war against arrack). It ran a 6-months campaign during which it published several editorials, warnings, appeals, etc., in support of the movement, statements and actions of various political entities and leaders, deaths due to illicit liquor and, accidents due to drunk driving, etc. They even introduced a new feature called the "Saro Kathalu" (Liquor Tragedies), which narrated stories of prosperous homes which were destroyed by alcoholism. (Brughubanda, n.d.). These creative forms of protest and extensive media coverage not only unified and educated the public but also put pressure on politicians who could no longer ignore the issue. It, therefore, built a moral consensus to support the movement.

3. OUTCOMES AND POLICY IMPACT

After months of constant struggle, the hardships bore fruit for the women in Dubagunta. As more and more districts joined the Anti-Arrack movement, the then Chief Minister, K. Vijayabhaskara Reddy, was forced to ban arrack in the State with effect from 1st October 1993. The Excise Department was entrusted with the job of preventing the smuggling of arrack from neighbouring states, besides checking the manufacture of spurious liquor and adulteration of toddy. In order to create awareness among the people, the Information Department launched a massive publicity campaign against liquor. Cultural teams gave public performances in each village, including dances, dramas, film shows, slides, and exhibitions. Huge cut-outs against drinking were to be seen all over the city. (Pande, 2000) However, the sale of the Indian-made-foreign-liquor (IMFL)was still pulling back the success of the struggle. Eenadu, along with NGOs and women's organizations, continued to fight for a Total prohibition. In the 1994 elections, it remained a very significant electoral issue. Ultimately, Telugu Desam Party's (TDP) candidate, N.T. Rama Rao contested the elections promising to do the needful. On 16th January 1995, total prohibition was imposed in the State as Rama Rao became the new Chief Minister. Eenadu had published – "This is the day when the tearful appeals of the Telugu daughters are being finally heard". Soon after, officials and observers reported declines in crime and remarkable improvements in literacy (in one account, female literacy in parts of the State jumped to 80 percent) – signs that families were becoming more harmonious and society more stable.

Ultimately, the total prohibition would be reversed in 1997 by the subsequent administration, citing enforcement challenges and revenue losses. Andhra Pradesh's anti-liquor wave spurred debates and similar campaigns in other regions, making it a reference point for grassroots influence on policy in India. However, these victories also raised deeper questions. The prohibition was hard-won, but could it be maintained? And what did it mean for the state's model of development that women's voices had so forcefully recalibrated policy? The next section examines how this movement challenged prevailing governance and development paradigms.

Development For Whom: Driving Governance and Social Reform

Perceptions about a movement on the basis of the gender of its participants can impact its outcomes in ways that either facilitate or hamper the achievement of the movement's objectives. Maxine Molyneux's concept of gender interests (Molyneux, 1985) explains the assumption that divisions of labour and separate spheres of social responsibility place differential importance on particular movement outcomes for women and men. In essence, gender standpoint and social positioning interact with caste and class to differentially prioritize particular social needs. In the Anti-Arrack movement, women's practical gender interests (immediate needs like family welfare and freedom from domestic violence) were the driving force. Yet by collectively pursuing these aims, the women also started to fulfil strategic gender interests – asserting their political agency and challenging gender power relations by bringing a "private" issue into the public sphere. The Movement became a women's movement which saw the articulation of the issue of family violence in a public forum. It showed a feminist way of looking at issues, especially politics, thus aligning women's issues to the larger issues of State and society. The movement questioned notions about the political apathy of suffering masses and the inability of women to take the future into their own hands without male support and leadership. It exemplified the feminist adage' the personal is political' by turning kitchen-table woes into state-level policy debates. It is through this movement that rural women in the State of Andhra Pradesh created history (Pande, 2000)

The most prominent feature of it was that it was launched and sustained exclusively by women, all rural, with hardly any background of education or previous experience of agitations. The activities, be it canvassing, patrolling at night, organizing processions and sit-ins or stopping men from drinking, were on the shoulders of the women. The women collectively devised their own methods of imposing fines or punishing violators. Most of these decisions were taken in a group, whether it was parading drunk men, sometimes on a donkey, garlanding them with slippers, beating the drunkards with a broom, refusing them food, shaving off half their heads, or imposing fines of as much as INR 2,000 (Pande, 2000). Such measures illustrate a form of local governance by women – they created parallel informal institutions (village committees, social sanctions) to enforce the ban even before the state acted. This community governance aspect underscores how thoroughly the women took charge of their social environment.

The village committees formed in different villages to monitor the sales were also led by the women of the poorer dalit households. These committees did not have any political representation or affiliations. However, there were also some contrary scenes found in some villages where the upper caste women only had passive support for these committees. In other villages like the ones in Ranga Reddy district, no upper caste women are even remotely concerned with the struggle against arrack contractors and police. (Reddy & Patnaik, 1993)

The movement initially seemed to be an issue of the Dalit, Muslims and oppressed rural women only and therefore, the participation was limited to the rural. But as the movement progressed and reached further districts, even middle-class women also joined the movement as Men in the urban were not any less addicted to alcohol. It was not just the problem of lower-class or rural women only but equally problematic for upper-class households in the cities. These dynamics show that while the movement was broad, it was not devoid of social hierarchies. Lower-caste and minority women often spearheaded the effort, possibly because they were most impacted by arrack and had less to lose by rebelling, whereas some upper-caste women were initially hesitant. The campaign’s trajectory also revealed intersectional dynamics: Dalit and minority women were often on the frontlines, perhaps because they had less social privilege to lose, whereas some upper-caste women were initially hesitant. However, the universal impact of alcoholism eventually bridged these divides, demonstrating an intersectional issue that cut across caste and class. Yet, as the movement gained momentum, it transcended these barriers – alcohol abuse proved to be an issue that cut across caste and class, eventually drawing in middle-class urban women as well. It was no longer caste that was the salient factor but the household as a unit, and women came in large numbers to protest against arrack in their villages. The overlapping of the Anti-liquor and Anti-arrack movements garnered a lot of support and attention. And eventually, total prohibition turned out to be a joint victory for both of them.

A major drawback of the movement was that the rural women also fought to know why their village did not have drinking water, schools for children and why they did not get proper wages. None of the basic amenities were available in their village except arrack. But this part of the issue was very conveniently side-lined as the mainstream media wanted to focus only on arrack. This reveals how movements can be framed by outside interests: the women's holistic demands for better living conditions were distilled by media into a single issue (liquor), likely because it made for a more compelling and unified story. While this focus helped achieve the liquor ban, the other grievances (lack of water, education, fair wages) remained unaddressed, pointing to limits in how far a single-issue mobilization can go in delivering comprehensive development. But nonetheless, the movement went a long way towards awakening self-

confidence and a sense of collective power and identity in women. And now, with their numbers, their confidence came through bargaining not only with the men in their village but also with police, thugs, ministers, arrack contractors and government officials.

Undeniably, the arrack trade and consumption had some extra-economic dimensions; one being social, i.e., the gender specificity of the suffering and the other is political, i.e., criminal portends with its ramifications for the political and the civil life of the country. Direct interactions with both these dimensions made women realize that their misery is perpetuated by the social system, which needs to be transformed simultaneously without deviating from the immediate objective of a ban on arrack. But the victory was short-lived. Post the ban, liquor flowed from neighbouring States and the programme did not yield the desirable results. Having introduced partial prohibition in the State, the state Government took over the wholesale trade in IMFL on 1st January 1994. For this, it amended the provisions of the Andhra Pradesh Excise Act, so as to make the ban on arrack and the New Excise Policy effective and successful. It hiked the licensing fee of wine shops, and as a consequence, the number of wine shops came down from 5043 in January 1993 to 4,408. (Shodhganga). In confronting the excise-driven development model, these women were enacting a feminist political economy critique: they exposed how the state's pursuit of revenue was fundamentally at odds with the well-being of its citizens (especially women)

4. CONCLUSION

The Anti-Arrack movement in Andhra Pradesh offers more than just a singular story of success in curbing liquor sales – it represents a paradigm shift in how we understand grassroots agency and development. In this case study, we have seen how a group of rural women, armed initially with nothing more than literacy and their collective anguish, evolved into a formidable force that reconfigured state policy. They turned a personal plight into political action, embodying the idea that citizens at the margins can assert power over entrenched systems. Key themes that emerge from this analysis are:

First, the movement underscores the potency of gendered collective action: when women galvanized around their shared practical interests – protecting their families from the ravages of alcohol – they also advanced their strategic interests by claiming a voice in the public arena. In challenging corrupt contractors and a complacent state, they shattered stereotypes of women's political apathy and proved that even those long excluded from formal power can articulate and pursue an alternative vision of governance.

Second, the movement invites a re-examination of "development" from the ground up. The Andhra Pradesh government had long equated development with economic growth and revenue, even if it came at the expense of social well-being. The Anti-Arrack protesters flipped this script. Their victory – a state-wide prohibition spurred by village-level activism – compelled policymakers to prioritize social welfare over a lucrative revenue stream. In doing so, these women broadened the definition of development to include dignity, health, and safety in the home. The case prompts us to ask, development for whom? – echoing the paper's theme "Whose Development?". The answer the movement provides is clear: development must be accountable to those at the receiving end of policy, not just those who profit from it. When the women of Dubagunta demanded water, fair wages, and education alongside the ban on arrack, they were articulating a holistic vision of development that the mainstream narrative conveniently narrowed. Their struggle thus highlights both the possibilities and limits of single-issue movements: a focused campaign can achieve concrete change (a liquor ban), but the broader structural inequalities (access to basic services, patriarchal control of resources) require continued advocacy.

Finally, the Anti-Arrack movement's legacy is reflected in its broader implications for governance and social reform. It demonstrates that grassroots mobilization can serve as a corrective mechanism in democracy, pushing the state to act on injustices that it has overlooked. The movement's influence on the 1994 elections – with prohibition becoming a decisive issue – exemplifies how public opinion, when shaped by grassroots advocacy and media amplification, can align political incentives with people's needs. There are cautionary lessons too: the "short-lived" nature of the victory (as illicit liquor flows and eventual policy rollbacks later showed) reminds us that social change is an ongoing process. Policy gains must be vigilantly safeguarded and complemented by broader development measures to be sustainable. Yet, even if total prohibition in Andhra Pradesh was later diluted, the empowerment and consciousness that the Anti-Arrack movement instilled in women citizens is an irreversible achievement. It reconfigured social expectations – women learned to

negotiate with officials, confront social ills openly, and insist on accountability, setting the stage for future movements and dialogues on gender and governance.

In conclusion, the Anti-Arrack movement is a testament to the transformative potential of grassroots feminist mobilization. It bridges the gap between the private and the public, showing that when marginalized voices unite, they can rewrite policy agendas and challenge the very meaning of progress. This case study contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship by illuminating how governance can be co-produced by citizens and how development, as a concept, can be democratized. The women of Andhra Pradesh's anti-liquor campaign may have started by saying "no" to arrack, but in effect, they were saying "yes" to a new form of people-centric governance – a legacy that endures in the continued fight for inclusive and equitable development. It invites further reflection on how such grassroots energies can be sustained and integrated into formal policy-making for lasting change.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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