

Women and Environment with Special Reference to India: An Assessment

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Abstract: Women are the pillars of the society. Though their contribution to the social, political and economical plethora is not given priorities, their contribution to the household activities can't be denied by anyone. Due to the existing gender roles in the society, women are always expected to be within the four walls of their own homes. Perhaps, this results in more inclination of women towards the environment. Because women rely on environment for their household chores- starting from cooking to relaxing. Women are the best collectors of natural resources. They depend on natural resources such as water, trees, land etc for their household chores. Hence, the loss of environment directly impact the lives of women. This paper tries to show the relationship between women and environment, various environmental movements etc.

Introduction-

Women are the active agents of conservation and restoration of environment [1]. Globally researchers have been trying their level best to link gender equality with balanced environment and to portray how degrading environmental situations can result in the enhancement of men- women gap as well as refusal to women's rights. For example, countries with more women in their parliaments are likely to set aside protected land and ratify environmental treaties [1]

The main reason behind examining the issue of women and environment is to show the role of women in the development of a balanced sustainable environment. For example, in India women are seen to be attached with forest environment sometimes for household chores and sometimes due to their mother kind of love.

The world summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, 2002 confirmed the need for gender analysis and gender mainstreaming in all efforts and the recognition of women's land rights. But growing population and technological advancement are continuously putting a strain in the environment and on country's natural resources [2].

The interdependence of women with nature can be evolved from the following observations-

1. Women are having base and skills for natural resource management.
2. Women are better managers for natural resources
3. Women have sensitiveness towards environment.
4. Women have high ecological consciousness [2]

Women are regarded as the best caretakers of environment since ancient days. Women play the most important role in managing environment.

Methodology-

This paper is based on qualitative studies, The information in the paper are collected through the secondary sources of knowledge, such as books, newspapers, article ,journals, internet, archives etc.

Objectives of the paper-

1. To know the linkages between women and environment.
2. To know about the various ecological movements

The role of women in various ecological movements-

Ecological movements emerging from conflicts over natural resources and the people's rights to survival are spreading in regions like Indian sub continent where most natural resources are already being utilized to fulfill the basic survival needs of large majority of people. The intensity and range of ecology movements in independent India have continuously widened as predatory exploitation of natural resources to feed the process of development had increased in extent and intensity [3].

Women and environment are closely bounded and intimate relation between women and nature led to the emergence of theory of eco-feminism, which is a field bridging ecological ethics and feminism that seeks to explore the conceptual connections between environmental degradation and sexist oppression [4]. Women through their role as farmers and collectors of water and fire-woods have a close connection with their local environment, women and children as well as marginalized sections are the prime victims of environmental degradation especially at times of natural disasters [5, 6].

Women have been involved in several governmental and non governmental forestry and environment programs. These are –

1. Chipko movement
2. Community forestry programs
3. Social forestry programs
4. Individual conservation programs
5. SHGs conservation programs
6. Green belt movement
7. Keep the city clean program
8. Green India clean India programs [7]

The role of women in the restoration and conservation of forest can be well observed through their role in various ecological movements. These are elaborated in the detailed manner following –

1 .Chipko Movement-

The Chipko movement was a ecological movement, with its focus on preservation and conservation of forests started in 1973 in Gharwala division of Uttar Pradesh. The collective mobilization of women in this movement has brought about a situation of conflict regarding their own status in the society. They started demanding their share in the decision making process along with men. On one hand women were fighting for their own rights and on the other hand for the cause of a social movement. The chipko movement was a process of women's participation [8]. This movement very well shows the connection between women and environment, how loss of environment can enhance the degrading status of women and hence make women conscious of their rights.

2. Appiko Movement-

The Appiko movement is also an important social movement started in Karnataka in 1983. This movement was launched against the governmental policy to open forest for industrial development. In consequence, several men, women and children hugged trees. The role of Mahila Mandal is quite relevant here including the role played by Adivasi women [2].

3. Silent Valley Movement-

Silent Valley is one of the important biodiversity hotspot in Southern end of Western Ghats in Kerala in 1976. This silent valley movement was against the decision of the government to construct a dam for hydroelectric power project in silent valley forest led by Sugatha Kumari [9]. In account of several protests and the active role played by women, the forest was declared as a National Park.

4. Narmada Bachao Andolan-

The Narmada Bachao Andolan is perhaps the longest living Gandhian non violent movement in the history of world started in 1985 in areas around the Narmada River. The river is witness to a great struggle of ordinary people using forgotten Gandhian tools and reinterpreting them. Nari Shakti Ka Sanman was the most significant slogan of the movement. Even women were ready to compromise their life for the sake of the river and to prohibit the construction of dam [10].

5. Navdanya Movement-

Navdanya is the largest organic movement in 1984 as a program of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology a participatory research initiative to provide direction and support to environmental activism. Navdanya means nine crops that represent India's collective source of food security [11]. The main aim is to save seeds from biopiracy. Mostly the members of Navdanya movement were women farmers from various part of the country [7].

Hence, some of the most iconic environment- the Chipko movement, the Navdanya movement, the Narmada Bachao Andolan originated in India, helped by women who were breaking new ground [12]. Among them some women environmentalist who truly deserves a mention are - Amrita Devi, Gaura Devi, Medha Patkar, Maneka Gandhi, Vandana Shiva etc [7].

Conclusions-

Forest is considered one of the most important natural resources and it becomes mandatory to preserve and conserve it. It is important for maintaining the ecology and women play a very vital role in its protection [13]. The destruction of environment mostly effects women as they are the mostly attached to environment.

Now in the present era as women role is recognized in every field so their role in ecology management must also be recognized to accelerate the active participation of women. Because, women in rural areas are more linked with natural resources and conservation than men. Their traditional gender roles bring them in daily contact with natural resources such as land, water, forest and wildlife[14]. It is seen that women's contribution lead to better following of rules and a greater transparency in the working in any field. It even leads to an improved conflict resolution and improved observance [13].

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