

Women and Environment Movement

Dr. Priti Ghatani

Asst. Professor, Political Science, Rani Birla Girls College, Kolkata 700 017

Abstract- Women occupy a multifarious role in the society; They are thought to be the nurturers, the caregivers, the homemakers, and they have brawled long and hard for self-determination and vigorous role in their communities. The rendezvous of caregiving and home-based tasks to women means that women are projected to perform these tasks while also participating in society. Men tend to destroy nature to earn cash even if it means creating hardship in their own families for their womenfolk to collect fuel and fodder. Women work as unpaid laborers on family farms with a greater role than men in operational decision making. Women give greater priority to protection of and improving the capacity of nature, maintaining farming lands, and caring for nature and environment's future.

Key words: multifarious, environment, participation, protection

Conventionally, women have been responsible for subsistence and survival for water, food, fuel, fodder and habitat, though they rarely get the credit for nurturing these life support systems. Added to this environmental annihilation, aggravates women's problems in a very challenging from then that of men. The challenge is to re-establish the symbiosis between communities, women and natural resources and reverse the trend of the negative impact of existing developmental paradigms. Women have always been the principal conservers of bio-diversity. Even today they perform duties such as seed selection, multiplication and conservation. Women have dealt with non-monetized biomass based subsistence economy of the household i.e. firewood, cow dung, crop wastes, organic manure, etc. In comparison men tend to destroy nature to earn cash even if it means creating hardship in their own families for their womenfolk to collect fuel and fodder e.g. sale of herbs and wood. In developing areas of the world, women are considered the primary users of natural resources (land, forest and water), because they are the ones who are responsible for gathering food, fuel and fodder. Women give greater priority to protection of and

improving the capacity of nature, maintaining farming lands, and caring for nature and environment's future. Repeated studies have shown that women have a stake in environment and this stake is reflected in the degree to which they care about natural resources. Ecofeminism refers to women's and feminist perspectives on the environment - where the domination and exploitation of women, of poorly resourced peoples and of nature is at the heart of the ecofeminist movement.

The Indian Environmental Movement representing various points of Crusading Gandhian, Ecological Marxist, Appropriate Technology and, more recently, Scientific Conservation and Wilderness Enthusiasts (1995). Common to all these streams is the acknowledgement of the failure of the present development mode. But there is no unanimity on possible alternatives. The **Crusading Gandhian's** discard the modern way of life and invoke Gandhi's concept of '**Ram Rajya**', i.e., as return to the pre-colonial, pre-capitalist village society. They consider modern science responsible for all the country's problems. They advocate an alternative no modern philosophy rooted in Indian tradition. **The Ecological Marxists**, swayed by Marxist philosophy see the inadequate access to resources as the basic problem in society. They are most diligently acknowledged with **People's Science Movements** and are now encouraging environmental security. They are against tradition and emphasize provocative movements. Tumbling between these two streams are the **Appropriate Technologists**. With regard to modern science, they are pragmatic, arguing for an amalgamation of traditional and modern technological knowledge systems. Though they recognize the existence of socio-economic hierarchies, they do not clearly tackle them. **The Scientific Conservationists** draw consideration to the aggregate deprivation of land and water. The Wilderness Enthusiasts highlight the decline of natural forests, plant and animal species and demand a total ban on human activity in protected

areas. Though neither of the above has a popular following they have significant stimulus on government policy. Both the streams look to the state for clarifications to environmental problems. However, both groups overlook the socio-economic roots of environmental degradation. They are seen more as 'elite' environmentalists.

WOMEN ARE AFFECTED DIFFERENTLY THAN MEN BY ENVIRONMENT

Many women through national and international non-governmental organization have acknowledge themselves to the world that they not only have the right to participate in environmental dilemmas but they have different affiliation with environment including diverse needs, responsibilities, and awareness about natural resources. They are affected inversely than men by environmental degradation, deforestation, pollution and over pollution. Women are often the most directly affected by environmental issues. Studies have shown the direct effects of chemicals and pesticides on human health. According to United Nations Chronicle journal researchers have found an association between breast cancer and the pesticide DDT and its derivative DDE; and also one study by the World Health Organization has found that women who are exposed to pesticides face a higher risk of abortion. These kinds of health problems cause women to feel more accountable regarding environmental disputes. The environmental degradation caused while men have had dominance over women, and women's large investment in environmental sustainability, some have theorized that women would protect the Earth better than men if in power. Although there is no evidence for this assumption, recent movements have shown that women are more thoughtful to the Earth and its problems. They have created a distinctive assessment system about environmental issues. People's approaches to environmental issues may depend on their relationship with nature ex. Peepal, Awala, Tulsi, Bargad are Holistic plants & tree. Both women and nature have been considered as subservient beings by men in history, which bears a close association amongst them.

PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION OF ENVIRONMENT IN INDIA

Though the Government of India is working towards an environmentally comprehensive and sustainable quality of life, the glitches, trials and disputes are multi-faceted. However, women in India are playing a critical role in protection and preservation of environment. Depending on their different experience women in India have different perspective to the environment debate. Poor women's lives are not sorted and they see the issues in a broad and holistic perspective. They understand clearly that economics and environment are compatible. It reveals to them that soil water and vegetation, are necessary for their daily living, which requires care and good management. Environmental degradation is related not only to the biosphere alone, but to the social sphere as well. To accomplish this, resources and strength of women need to be channelized to cultivate their full potential so as to take their lawful place as like allies in all domains. In the Indian Constitutional certain special legislations are also available for Environmental protection such as: The Air (Prevention and control of pollution) Act-1981 the Water (Prevention and control of Pollution) Act, 1974. The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. The India Forest Act, 1927. The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and the comprehensive legislation. Environmental protection Act, 1986.

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

The Department of Biotechnology has originated programs since 1998 to empower women and rural population by imparting skills for additional income generation. The program has been deliberate to train the human resources in captivating the technology to be implemented and practiced by them and finally how the product can be developed and sold in the market. Therefore, the marketing skill has been considered as one of the major aspects. The program also foresees training for the entrepreneurship so that it can fascinate women and rural youth to start their trivial enterprises for their livelihood. While scheming such programs adequate emphasis has been given on management traits including commercial administration.

The projects were designed in three different modes:

- 1) Field demonstration.
- 2) Extension oriented activities and development of entrepreneurs in the proven biotechnologies.
- 3) Research & Development Programs specially addressed to specific problems to the women.

Through history men have observed at natural resources as commercial entities or income generating tools, while women have inclined to see the environment as a resource support their basic needs. Any changes in the environment, like deforestation have the most effect on women of that and cause them to suffer until they can survive with these changes e.g. Chipko Movement.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN ENVIRONMENT MOVEMENT SINCE 1970

The emergence of the Indian environmental movement can perhaps be dated to 1973, when the famous Chipko Movement began in the central Himalayas was one of the first environmentalist movement which was inspired by women was the Chipko Movement (Women tree-huggers in India). The movement was an act of defiance against the state government's consent given to a corporation for commercial logging. Women of the villages repelled, embracing trees to prevent their felling to safeguard their lifestyles which were dependent on the forests. With the help of a non-governmental organization that Chandi Prasad led, The Chipko movement adopted the slogan "ecology is permanent economy." The women embracing the trees did not tag their action as feminist activism; however, as a movement that demonstrated resistance against oppression, it had all the markings of such. The Chipko movement emerged as a protest against the granting of permission for access to the forests to commercial timber operators, while the local people were refused access to the forests for making agricultural implements. The movement, which spread rapidly to other villages, saw the active involvement of women. They worked jointly with the men of their community and in some cases even against them, when they differed with them over the use of forest resources. Women were more concerned with the long term gain of saving the forests and environment and hence, subsistence and survival issues, rather than the short-term gain through commercial projects like mono culture forests, potato

seed farms, etc. The scope of the movement broadened and involved issues of male alcoholism, domestic violence, women's representation in village councils, as well as against mining in the hills. It helped women recognize the inter-connections between nature and human sustenance. The movement was carried forward largely by women using Gandhian techniques of protest. Much has been written about the Chipko movement (Bandyopadhyay and Shiva '87) and women's involvement in it is celebrated by some feminist scholars (Shiva 1988), as an expression of women's special relation to nature.

However, academics like Shobhita Jain (1984), Ramchandra Guha (1989), Madhav Gadgil and Ramchandra Guha (1992), have argued that it should be seen in the context of the peasant struggles of the region. The 1970s also witnesses a number of forest based conflicts in the tribal areas of Bihar, Orissa, MP, Maharashtra and AP. There have also been local level struggles by village artisans faced with draining forest resources. But they have yet to be politically organized (Gadgil and Guha 1995).

Conflicts have arisen over the sharing of water resources, as over the use of the Kaveri waters between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, putting the rich against the rich. The overuse of ground water resources has pitted the upper castes and classes against the lower castes and classes as in Gujarat and Karnataka (Gadgil and Guha 1995).

Another major focus of the environmental movement has been to check air and water pollution with the help of state legislation and enforcement agencies. In India, industrial pollution has largely gone unchecked because laws are not obligatory and criminals bribe corrupt officials to look the other way. The worst industrial disaster was the Bhopal Gas Tragedy.

Nobel Prize winner Professor Wangari Maathai founded Green Belt movement on the World Environment Day in June 1977. The starting ceremony was very simple: a few women planted seven trees in Maathai's backyard. By 2005, 30 million trees had been planted by participants in the Green Belt movement on public and private lands. The Green Belt movement aims to bring environmental restoration along with society's economic growth. This movement led by Maathai focused on restoration of Kenya's rapidly diminishing forests as well as empowering the rural women through environmental preservation, with a special emphasis on planting indigenous trees

movement initiated by these Indian women (which also is where the term tree-huggers originated). This conflict started because men wanted to cut the trees to use them for industrial purposes while women wanted to keep them since it was their food resource and deforestation was a survival matter for local people

CONCLUSION

The Indian environmental movement represents a wide spectrum of social conflicts over dwindling natural resources. It has grown rapidly over the decades and represents conflicts localized within villages or spread across large areas involving large numbers of people. The proliferation of voluntary groups working within the environmental movement, are mainly concerned with activities that destroy the environment and impoverish local communities large dams on rivers, mining in the hills, mechanized fishing in the coastal regions, commercial agriculture or destruction of forests. However, this vibrant environmental movement is more a 'defensive movement. It has not questioned the larger socio-political processes responsible for ecological deterioration and has failed to contribute to the major debates on development policy. Women are the most affected partner in the environment haggard and also the key to transformation in the legislation of the state.

REFERENCE

- [1] Agarwal B 1992. 'The Gender and Environment Debate: Lessons from India', *Feminist Studies* 18:1 (Spring) pp. 119-158.
- [2] N Rao, L Rurup, R Sudarshan (cd), 1996, *Sites of Change: The Structural Context for Empowering Women in India*, pp 203-253,
- [3] EFS and UNDP. - 1994. *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*, Cambridge, Cambridge, University Press.
- [4] Bahuguna S, 1984. 'Women's Non-violent Power in the Chipko Movement', in Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita eds, *In Search of Answers: Indian Women's Voices in Manushi*, London, Zed Books.
- [5] Bandyopadhyay J and Shiva V 1997. 'Chipko', Seminar No. 330, February. Baneree N, 1991, *Indian Women in a Changing Industrial Scenario*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- [6] Biehl J, 1991, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, Boston, South End Press. Birkeland J, 1993, 'Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice', in Greta Gaard (ed.), 1993, *Ecofeminism; Women, Animals and Nature*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press.
- [7] Bandyopadhyay, J. (1999) 'Chipko Movement: Of floated Myths and Flouted Realities', *Economic and Political Weekly* April 10.