

## Environment and Role of Women

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**Abstract:** Environment consists of the sum total of the stimulation that the individual receives from conception in the mother's womb to death. The word environment has been derived from the French word 'Environner' meaning encircling or surrounding. With environment women have a close relationship. Women constitute half of the human capital in the world. In India, they are popularly termed as "adhi-abadi" of the nation. Mostly in all the courtiers, only women have the primary responsibility for nutrition, child care and household management. In the developing countries, women play a major role as farmer, animal tender, water and fuel collector etc. They are also active in environmental issues. Women have good knowledge of use of local flora and fauna like herbal medicines, food, fuel etc. They play a vital role not only in conservation of natural resources but also make contribution to the economic development. If we try to find that who are more closely found to related in protection and conservation of environment, it is the women. In every day life they are dealing with environment. It is in their heart. In the present society environmental degradation is a burning issue. Our environment is degrading day by day because of so may reason. Women can play a very positive role in conservation of mother earth. It is a theoretical paper. In this paper women's relationship with environment, their role regarding environmental conservation are discussed.

**Key word:** degradation, environment, awareness, conservation etc.

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### I. INTRODUCTION:

The dictionary meaning of the word environment is surroundings; external conditions influencing development or growth of people, animals or plants; living or working conditions etc. Environment consists of the sum total of the stimulation that the individual receives from conception in the mother's womb to death. The word environment has been derived from the French word 'Environner' meaning encircling or surrounding. According to Anastasi, "The environment is everything that affects the individual except his genes." According to section 2(a) of the Indian Environment (protection) Act, 1986, the term "Environment" includes water, air and land and human beings, other living creatures, plants, micro-organism and property. Environment is the source of life on earth and it not only directs but also determines the existence, growth and development of mankind and all its creativities. It is the subject which is global in nature. It has two types- natural environment and man-made environment. Under the natural environment any change in the system caused due to natural processing is counter balanced by the change in the other components of the environment. Man made environment is created by men such as industrial revolution, communication network like telephone, fax, agricultural apparatus, satellite and energy sources like thermal, hydro energy and atomic energy etc.

Women constitute half of the human capital in the world. In India, they are popularly termed as "adhi-abadi" of the nation. Mostly in all the courtiers, only women have the primary responsibility for nutrition, child care and household management. In the developing countries, women play a major role as farmer, animal tender, water and fuel collector etc. They are also active in environmental issues. Women have good knowledge of use of local flora and fauna like herbal medicines, food, fuel etc. They play a vital role not only in conservation of natural resources but also make contribution to the economic development. If we try to find that who are more closely found to related in protection and conservation of environment, it is the women. Women living in rural areas and mountain areas are more near to environment. In every day life they are dealing with environment. It is in their heart. So women can play a very positive role in conservation of mother earth. As they are in the direct contact with the environment they get deep knowledge about it. Thus women have served as agriculturalists, water resource manager, and traditional scientists, among others. Dankelman and Davidson (1998) observed that women play a key role in managing their natural surroundings and adopt several mechanisms to deal with the kinds of environmental crisis they face. They, however observe that the responses of governments have not been significant and as a result women, men, and children continue to face problems including pollution, poor services, human waste pollution, fumes from household fuel, and the consequences of soil erosion and flooding.

As rightly noted by Dashe(19191) , without the enhanced perception of a gendered analysis to guide in to the future environmental management programs, a crash is inevitable. Therefore, there is the need to understand the various ways women have actively participated in environmental protection and management with a view to integrate them into environmental management programs. According to the world bank in 1991, “ women play an essential role in the management of natural resources , including soil, water , forests and energy ..And often have a profound traditional and contemporary knowledge of the natural world around them.” Mexico City, where ‘women and environment issue’ was brought in to the public consciousness by the Indian Physicist Vanndana singha.

**Environmental degradation and its causes:**With the word environment now a day’s degradation word is closely related .In the present society environmental degradation is a burning issue. Our environment is degrading day by day because of so may reason. Developed countries are observing controlled environmental pollution but the condition of other countries is pathetic. Though the sources of the environmental pollution are multi dimensional, but the following are the major source of environmental pollution or degradation---

**Population growth-** the growth of uncontrolled human population is the most responsible factor for environmental pollution. It is caused due to unmindful human activities. There by ecological balance is disturbed. India is the second largest country in the world. The government has sponsored so many family planning programmes but it has failed to achieve its goals to because of poverty, lack of education and conservation approach of certain communities.

**Deforestation-** it has harmful effect on human life because poisonous carbon-dioxide is taken by trees and plants only. Deforestation has direct adverse impact on soil and land because of exposure of ground surface to high intensity of rain fall. One major cause for deforestation is the conversion of forest land into agricultural land that is why rate of erosion of soil has rapidly increased in the recent time, which has generated environmental degradation. The national forest policy was adopted by the parliament in 1988 shortly before the passage of the amendment to the forest (conservation) act but the undue exploitation of forest could not be checked.

**Industrial development**—industries are emitting carbon-dioxide, carbon-monoxide and other toxic gases thus the natural gaseous composition of atmosphere is rapidly changing and toxic gases are affecting human health, aquatic life and also plants and trees. Such ecological imbalance may cause skin cancer and other dangerous diseases.

**Unplanned urbanization**— it is one of the most important reason for degradation of environment. Over population helps unplanned urbanization. Because of unplanned urbanization quality of life of the people decrease day by day. Over population in the cities creates some other problems like air pollution, water pollution, noise pollution etc. Developing intention for living in a city, attraction for high quality life etc. leads to unplanned urbanization.

**Technological development**—technology leads development of a country. But use of technology creates pollution like air pollution, noise pollution, land pollution, water pollution etc.

**Lack of environmental awareness**— lack of environmental awareness is another reason for environmental degradation. If people does not aware about it, if they does not have the knowledge of their own role regarding environment then degradation will happen in environment.

**Chemical effluents**—effluents are another by products of industries which poses threat to the environment. Petroleum industries and chemical manufacturing industries etc. creates major waste products which pollute river and aquatic life.

**Natural causes**---natural causes like quakes storms, tidal waves creates a lot resulting degradation to human life and environment. Human can not be blamed for these natural causes of environmental degradation.

#### **Role of Women in Conservation of Environment—**

More than 70% of the Indian population are in rural areas. Always it has been seen that the principal conservers of bio-diversity are women. Even today they perform duties such as seed selection, multiplication and conservation. The on-farm conservation traditions of rural and tribal women, with reference to agrobiodiversity are well known. Unfortunately, current food security systems depend on too few crops. It is important to expand the basis of food security by including large numbers of species and varieties of food plants still maintained by tribal and rural families.

Traditionally, women have dealt with non-monetized biomass based subsistence economy of the household i.e. firewood, cow dung, crop wastes, organic manure, etc. The fact is that women work as unpaid labourers on family farms with a greater role than men in operational decision making. Because of over population pressure has increased on male migration and it again increase the work load of women. It means that women's responsibilities extend from the household duties to working in the fields.

In developing countries women are regarded as primary users of natural resources because they are the ones who are responsible for gathering food, fuel and fodder. Although in these countries, women mostly can't own the land and farms but, they are the ones who spend most of their time working on the farms to feed the

household. Because of technological development male involvement with land decrease, many of them leave the farm to go to cities to find jobs; so women become increasingly responsible for an increasing portion of farm tasks. These rural women tend to have a closer relationship with land and other natural resources, which promotes a new culture of respectful use and preservation of natural resources and the environment, ensuring that the following generations can meet their needs. Besides considering how to achieve appropriate agricultural production and human nutrition, women want to secure access to the land. Women's perspectives and values for the environment are somewhat different than men's. 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.

Today, women struggle against alarming global trends, but they are working together to effect change. By establishing domestic and international non-governmental organizations, many women have recognized themselves and acknowledge to the world that they not only have the right to participate in environmental dilemmas but they have different relationship with environment including different needs, responsibilities, and knowledge about natural resources. This is why women are affected differently than men by environmental degradation, deforestation, pollution and over pollution. 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 responsible regarding environmental issues. Some have said that women would protect the Earth better than men if in power. Although there is no evidence for this hypothesis, recent movements have shown that women are more sensitive to the earth and its problems. They have created a special value system about environmental issues. While it is true that poor women continue to suffer various kinds of deprivation, discrimination and atrocities, the country has mounted a concerted on slaught against these problems through various development/empowering strategies to include confidence among women, bring an awareness of their own potential and to ensure their participation in their own development, an empowering strategy has been advocated by the Government based on promotion of literacy and education, credit, employment and income generation. Though the Government of India is working towards an environmentally sound and sustainable quality of life, the problems, challenges and issues are multi-faceted. However, women in India are playing a crucial role in protection and conservation of environment. Women in our country have brought a different perspective to the environment debate, because of their different experience base. Poor women in our country have brought a different perspective to the environment debate, because of their different experience base. Poor women's lives are not compartmentalized and they see the issues in a broad and holistic perspective. They understand clearly that economics and environment are compatible. Their experience reveals to them that soil water and vegetation, necessary for their day-to-day living, requires care and good management. Environmental degradation is related not only to the biosphere alone, but to the social sphere as well.

Throughout history men have looked at natural resources as commercial entities or income generating tools, while women have tended to see the environment as a resource support their basic needs. As an example, rural Indian women collect the dead branches which are cut by storm for fuel wood to use rather than cutting the live trees. Since African, Asian and Latin American women use the land to produce food for their family, they acquire the knowledge of the land / soil conditions, water, and other environmental features. Any changes in the environment on these areas, like deforestation, have the most effect on women of that area, and cause them to suffer until they can cope with these changes.

An example of female predominance in the defense of natural forests comes from India in 1906. As forest clearing was expanding conflict between loggers and government and peasant communities increased. To thwart resistance to the forest cleaning, the men were diverted from their villages to a fictional payment compensation site and loggers were sent to the forests. The women were left in the villages, however, they protested by physically hugging themselves to the trees to prevent their being cut down and this is now called now called the Chipko movement.

**Chipko movement** One of the first environmentalist movements which were inspired by women was the Chipko movement (Women tree-huggers in India). "Its name comes from a Hindi word meaning to stick" (as in glue). The movement was an act of defiance against the state government's permission given to a corporation for commercial logging. Women of the village resisted, embracing trees to prevent their felling, to safeguard their lifestyles which were dependent on the forests. Deforestation could qualitatively change the lives of all village residents but it was the women who agitated for saving the forests. Organized by a non-governmental

organization that Chandi Prasad led, The Chipko movement adopted the slogan "ecology is permanent economy."

**Green Belt movement** Another movement, which is one of the biggest in women and environment history, is the Green Belt movement. Nobel Prize winner Wangari Maathai founded this 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. 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.

**Rachel Carson** One of the outstanding women environmentalists is Rachel Carson. Rachel Carson (1907-1964) was a scientist, writer, and ecologist. Rachel Carson went to the Pennsylvania College for Women, majoring in English, but she was inspired by her biology teacher so she switched her major to biology. She became more interested and focused on the sea while she was working at the Marine Biological Laboratories in Massachusetts. Her eloquent prose led to the publication of her first book, *Under the Sea-Wind: a Naturalist's Picture of Ocean Life*, in 1941. In 1949 she became chief editor of the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). Her second book, *The Sea Around us*, won the National Book Award and sold more than 200,000 copies. After that she retired from FWS and became a full time writer. After her third book about the sea 'The Edge of the Sea' Carson focused on effects of chemicals and pesticides on the environment. That is when she wrote her book about environment, *Silent Spring*. The book was about what man has done to the nature and eventually to him and started a modern environmental movement. Carson believed that human and nature are mutually dependent on each other. She argued that industrial activities such as pesticides use can damage the earth ecosystem and will have far-reaching ecological consequences such as future human health problems. Today, scientific studies have demonstrated these consequences.

**Maria Cherkasova** Maria Cherkasova (1938) is a journalist, ecologist, and director of Centre for Independent Ecological Programs (CIEP). She is famous because of coordinating a 4-year campaign to stop construction of hydro-electric dam on the Katun River. After Cherkasova involvement in the student movement on environmental protection in 1960's, she began to work for the Red Data Book for the Department of Environmental Protection in 1960's. She began to work for the Red Data Book for the Department of Environmental Protection Institute. She researched and preserved rare species until she became the editor of USSR Red Data Book. She co-founded the Socio-Ecological Union which has become the largest ecological NGO in the former Soviet Union. In 1990, she became director of CIEP which arrange and drives activities in an extensive range of ecologically related areas on both domestic and international fronts. It is common knowledge throughout the world that the growth of technology and the processes of commercialization, industrialization, and globalization affect men and women differently. The world realizes, clearly today that real development cannot take roots if it by-passes women. Therefore, India embarks on bold and sweeping economic reforms, concern for women and efforts to bring them in main stream occupying the Centre stage. India has been a relentless champion of the success of women at all spheres in international and national forums. The women's movement in India continuously interacts with and informs public opinion. The Indian Parliament has been a front-runner in progressive legislation upholding the status of women. India has the distinction of running one of the world's largest primary health care systems and the largest child development program. India has set up a National Commission for Women through an Act of Parliament to serve as a kind of ombudsman for women's issues in the country and the day is not far off when the Parliament opens its doors for one third of its strength to women.

**Relevant legal provision on environment** India is one of the few countries of the world that have made a specific reference in the constitution of to the need for environmental protection, control and preservation. The constitution (42nd Amendment) Act of 1976 has made it a Fundamental duty to protect and improve the natural environment. Article 51 (a) provides that it shall be the duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wild life and have compassion for living creatures. Article 21 of Constitution guarantee the right to life; a life of dignity, to be lived in a proper environment, free from danger of disease and infection. Besides there are number of Directive Principles which give indirect emphasis for protection of environment. In addition to Indian Constitutional aspect, certain special legislations are also available in India for **Environmental protection such as ----**

1. The Air (Prevention and control of pollution) Act-1981
2. The Water (Prevention and control of Pollution) Act, 1974.

- 3.The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- 4.The India Forest Act, 1927.
- 5.The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and the comprehensive legislation.
- 6.Environmental protection Act, 1986

## **II. CONCLUSION**

In this paper women's participation in environmental protection, how they are conscious about environment, how they are closely attached to environment etc are discussed. Women can develop their role when society will support them properly. In this regard women education can play a very great role as education is the strongest weapon to any struggle. NGO'S also can help by providing some training regarding how women can help to decrease the environmental degradation, how can they protect the environment etc, to women The critical role of women, as resource managers, as community activists, as environmental advocates, must be recognized when strategies for the protection of the environment are being developed. Women should be allowed to participate at the local, regional, national, and international levels on environmental issues. In the words of Maye (1994), this participation, to be meaningful, should go beyond tokenism. To make a significant impact on decision making, women should be present in equal numbers to men (or at least on a 40:60 proportional split of genders). As resource managers, women should be consulted and supported in what they are already doing to protect the environment. Specifically, more women should be involved in decision making with regard to policies programs, or funding of environment.

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