

Study on safe environment : Do women have any role

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SUMMARY : In developing areas of the world, women are considered the primary users of natural resources like land, forest and water because they are responsible for gathering food, fuel, and fodder. Although in these countries, women mostly can't own the land and farms outright, they are the ones who spend most of their time working on the farms to feed the household. Shouldering this responsibility leads them to learn more about soil, plants and trees and not misuse them. Although, technological inputs increase male involvement with land. 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.

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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 (Jiggins and Janice, 1994). 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. Eco-feminism 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 (Mellor, 1997). Environmental or ecological feminism differs from eco-feminism in that it is more focused on the actual, specific interactions with the environment. Connections between environment and gender can be made by looking at the gender division of labour and environmental roles rather than an inherent connection with nature (Nightingale, 2006). The gender division of labor requires a more nurturing and caring role for women, therefore that caring nature places women closer with the environment (Tiondi, 2001). The knowledge of nature is shaped by the experiences

an individual has. Women have a distinct knowledge of the land, yet are excluded from policy decisions of development on that land (Tiondi, 2001). This is prominent in many developing countries where the responsibility of collecting fuel and fodder is placed upon the women (Agarwal, 1992). Both the resources and the meanings are taken into consideration with environmental feminism. There is a challenge to not only focus on the gender division of labor but also the actual appropriation methods of the resources (Agarwal, 1992). In other words, there is not simply an inherent connection between women and nature, rather there are material realities that exist (Nightingale, 2006). The deep connection between women and men comes from the daily interaction between them. In recent decades, environmental movements have increased as the movements for women's rights have also increased (Mellor, 1997). Today's union of nature preservation with women's rights and liberation has stemmed from invasion of their rights in the past (Merchant, 1996). 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

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for gathering food, fuel, and fodder.(Bella, 1995). Although in these countries, women mostly can't own the land and farms outright, they are the ones who spend most of their time working on the farms to feed the household. Shouldering this responsibility leads them to learn more about soil, plants, and trees and not misuse them. Although, technological inputs increase male involvement with land, 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 (Jiggins, 1994). 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. The Indian women were always ahead in the matter of prevention of pollution and protection, preservation, conservation, promotion and enhancement of the environment. They have made greater sacrifices; have exhibited greater love than man in the area of environment protection. The strong desire, devotion and dedication towards better environment made Indian women a crusador against environment pollution.

The direct concern of Indian women with environment protection can be traced long back to 1731 A.D., when Amrita Bai of Khejaralli village of Jodhpur Distt. of Rajasthan sacrificed her life for saving the trees of her village (Bella, 1995). She is the founder of the modern Chipko Movement (Women tree-huggers in India). In order to save the trees, she embraced the trees and was cut as per the orders of the then

Maharaja. Her three daughters and later her husband came forward and one by one 363 people were killed and the trees remained untouched because of villagers' strong resistance. This movement started by Amrita Bai in 1731 A.D. was revived by Bachni Devi and Gaura Devi of Uttar Pradesh in 1972. They snatched the axe from the wood cutters and warned contractors not to cut the trees. They gave a slogan which means forests bear soil, water and air and the three substances are basic requirements of our life (Dua, 1999). In this context an attempt to recapitulate the following contributions of women in natural resource management was undertaken.

Land and water :

Women plays an important role in land and water management. They are the most often the collectors, users, and managers of water in the house hold as well as farm sector. Because of these roles, women have considerable knowledge of water resources, including quality and reliability, restrictions, and acceptable storage methods. Women farmers, using traditional methods, have been effective in conserving soil fertility. These traditional practices are fallowing, crop rotation, intercropping, mulching, and a variety of other soil conservation and enrichment techniques. Men usually control cash crops and decisions regarding the scheduling of irrigation water tend to be made without consideration for women's productive and reproductive activities. Women farmer need to be part of the planning and implementation of land and water management programmes.

Table 1 : Common assumptions and impact on natural resource and environment

Common beliefs	Reality	Possible interventions
Literacy rate among women lesser than men.	Women and men have different types of knowledge about natural resources. Example: women- medicinal plants, men- cash crops.	Ensure consultative process with women and men to identify differential knowledge and needs.
Needs and interests are common for both men and women.	Women and men have different needs from natural resources. Example: women- house hold sustenance, Men- income generation.	Ensure consultative process with women and men to identify differential knowledge and needs.
Men indirectly represent women in all aspects.	Using one representative per house hold as the unit of participation generally excludes women. Example: community user groups	Provide all adults. Both women and men, right to membership and entitlement. Dual membership per household
Women have equal access and control over property with men.	Women may have access but lack control and ownership of property. Example: land titles.	User rights to households may be granted through women this will provide control over assets to women.
Community meets natural resource needs of its members equally.	Poorer and less powerful caste groups are more dependent on natural resources for their survival. Example: no additional benefits to poor women headed households.	Strengthen livelihoods existing users, check and control transfer of power non- users.
Women lack the capacity to make decisions.	Users groups and management comities are male dominated. Example: irrigation management committees.	Strict guidelines to ensure that at least 50% of the community groups have women members. Provision of social support, such as, child care facilities to relieve women's work burden. A strategy that encourages alliances and support from key male community leaders is effective.

In one the contractor says :

An extract from Chipko movement :

“You foolish village women, do you know what these forest bear?

Resin, timber, and therefore foreign exchange!”

The women answer:

“Yes, we know. What do the forests bear?

Soil, water, and pure air,

Soil, water, and pure air.”

Plants :

In sub Saharan Africa, it is estimated that women contribute 30-80% of the agricultural labour for crop production, depending on area and economic class. Women farmers play a leading role in maintaining crop diversity and population of valued wild plant species. They often have considerable knowledge about the characteristics, distribution, and site requirement of indigenous trees, shrubs, and herbs. 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.

Animals :

Women play key roles in raising animals and processing livestock products both for home consumption and for sale. Although men are often the owners and sellers of large livestock, it is the women who perform most of the household labour devoted to animals. The contribution of women to livestock production, processing, and to marketing live stock products is often overlooked. Women’s roles are increasing in virtually every link of the producer to consumer chain within the livestock sector. It is imperative to enhance their access to appropriate technologies and information regarding livestock husbandry and processing of animal products.

Some women who contributed for environmental protection :

Chipko Movement, Amrita Devi of Rajasthan.

Soil and water conservation activity by Bachni Devi and Gaura Devi of Uttar Pradesh.

Mrs. Sarla Tripathi of Indore, M.P.

Kinkari Devi of Sirmour District, Krishna Devi of Rajasthan

Menka Gandhi, an environmentalist and politician.

Medha Patekar -Narmada Bachao Andolan.

Bandana Shiva- Environmental activist.

Sunita Narain - related with Down to Earth , a referred journal on environment (Merchant, 1996).

Conclusion :

It is well understood that development any nation doesn’t only depend upon economy and infrastructure. It depends on many dimensions such as health, hygiene, education and environment. The role of women in protection of environment and sustainable development is well established from different findings. Their contributions are to be recognized, strengthened and given due respect in policy and planning issues.

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