



ISSN: 0976-3031

Available Online at <http://www.recentscientific.com>

International Journal of Recent Scientific Research
Vol. 7, Issue, 6, pp. 12188-12190, June, 2016

**International Journal of
Recent Scientific
Research**

Research Article

EMPOWERMENT AND ECO-FEMINISM

Jhuma Mukhopadhyay

LMC Sarani (Beside Tarun Sangha Library) Baksara Howrah-711110

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 17th March, 2016

Received in revised form 21st April, 2016

Accepted 06th May, 2016

Published online 28th June, 2016

Key Words:

Environmentalism, Gender-Empowerment,
Ecological movement, Environmental
Education

ABSTRACT

The gender-environment relations have valuable ramifications in regard to the understanding of nature between men and women, the management and distribution of resources and responsibilities and the day-to-day life and well being of people.] Women's perspectives and values for the environment are somewhat different from 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. 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 eco-feminist movement. Gender-based commitments and movements have reached to a new approach through the combination of feminism and environmentalism called eco-feminism, believe on the interconnection between the domination of women and nature.

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INTRODUCTION

The budding social consciousness from corner to corner of the globe has brought a number of issues to fore among which gender impartiality and empowerment of women are very noteworthy. Discrimination against women in the form of male female segregation reflects the core of the gender based structure. The education is the biggest therapeutic power and the rise in the levels of education which nourishes progressive stance and the beginning of industrialization and modernization have effected a sea change in the attitude and thinking prototype of the citizens. Thus the empowerment is not fundamentally political single handily in fact; political empowerment will not be successful in the deficiency of economic, socio-cultural and environmental empowerment.

Power is the ability to make choices. Empowerment is the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choice acquire such ability.

Although empowerment as a concept is relevant to women as well as to other disadvantaged or socially excluded groups. We focus on women due to the fact the women are a category of individuals that overlap with virtually all other social groups and women's empowerment is the basis of intra-household relation as well as outside the home and decision making and is thus critical to many, if not most development outcomes. The concern about women's economic and social empower has been at the top of the development priorities from many years as demonstrated by the fact that "promoting gender equality

and empowering women" is the third goal of the Millennium Development Goals.

"Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore is essential to achieving sustainable development."

If we talk of natural management from a global perspective, whom do we find in the forefront of the race for protection and preservation of the resources. The answer comes very naturally, it is the women. Women particularly those living in rural areas or mountain areas have special relationship with the environment. All women have relationship with environment but the approach is different from Urban Areas. They are more close to the nature than men and this very close relationship makes them perfect managers of an eco-system. The life of mountain women is so much intertwined with the environment that whole ecosystem revolves around her and she can't even think of her survival without it. For her forest is her mother's home as she is entirely dependent on the forest to meet her daily needs such as - water, fodder, fuels, minor forest product etc. role through formal and non-formal education.

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. 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.

*Corresponding author: *Jhuma Mukhopadhyay*

LMC Sarani (Beside Tarun Sangha Library) Baksara Howrah-711110

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. 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 an exploitation of women, of poorly resourced peoples and of nature is at the heart of the eco-feminist 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. Women are often the most directly affected by environmental issues, so they become more concerned about environmental problems.

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 hypothesis, recent movements have shown that women are more sensitive to the earth and its problems.

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.

Keeping in view the inherent capabilities of women in the management as well as the need for women entrepreneurship, development, educational and vocational training in various fields, communication skills, creativity and innovation, quality management and control, inventory and production management need to be strengthened throughout the length and breadth of the country. To achieve this, resources and strength of women need to be channelized to develop their full potential so as to take their rightful place as equal partners in all sphere.

As the world moves forward at a phenomenal speed with scientists and technological advances, there is a growing feeling that biotechnological empowerment of women is absolutely essential for progress.

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. 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.

It is common knowledge throughout the world that the growth of technology and the processes of commercialization, industrialization globalization affect men and women differently. The world realizes, clearly today that real development cannot take roots if it by-passes women, who not only represent half of the humanity, but represent the very level around which social change takes shape.

Ecological movements initiated by women

Chipko Movement

One of the first environmentalist movement which was 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 villages resisted, embracing trees to prevent their felling to safeguard their lifestyles which were dependent on the forests. Deforestation could qualitatively affect 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." 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.

It began when Maharaja of Jodhpur wanted to build a new palace in Rajasthan which is India's Himalayan foot hills. While the axemen were cutting the trees, martyr Amrita Devi hugged one of the trees. This is because in Jodhpur each child had a tree that could talk to it. The axmen ignored Devi and after taking her off the tree cut it down.

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 focussed 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.

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 Naturalists' 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 sold more than 200,000 copies. After that she retired from FWS and became a full time writer. After her third and final 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 himself, 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.

In addition to Indian Constitutional aspect, certain special legislations are also available in India 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

Research Studies conclude some suggestions

- The protection of women decision makers, planners, advisers and managers related to environmental management should be increased.
- Environmental education should be expanded in rural areas.
- Women when once mobilized play a significant role in environmental protection.
- The potential of science and Technology should be utilized to solve environmental related problems and ease women's workload inside and outside the home.
- The central government should develop a strategy to eliminate various obstacles - constitutional, legal, administrative, social and economic in nature to women's full participation in sustainable development.
- The Government, Non-Governmental Organizations, Environmental Conservation agencies and the common man should recognize and mobilize women as active participants to protect and enrich the natural resources that sustain us.
- To overcome the problem or obstacles associated with poverty and development gender empowerment is one of the necessary step for addressing human right.
- In spite of all these aspects there must be promotion of disseminating the gender relevant
- Knowledge and valuation of women's role through formal and non-formal education.

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How to cite this article:

Jhuma Mukhopadhyay. 2016, Empowerment and Eco-Feminism. *Int J Recent Sci Res*. 7(6), pp. 12188-12190.