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Understanding Gender In Environmental Security Discourse

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Abstract-

Environmental degradation has become a fiercely debated issue across the globe. World community recognises the fact that ecological disasters are major human security threats. The natural environment provides essential necessities without which life on the planet could not be thought of. But unfortunately, ecological misbalances are being experienced around the world as people with their greedy reasoning are exploiting nature unrestrictedly. Everyone across the world is suffering from environmental degradation in one or another form. However, it is also empirically recognised that women are most vulnerable to natural disasters everywhere including India, because of their socio-cultural conditionalities. In other words, ecological degradation has gendered implications. It is also noticeable that due to closer connection to nature, women can play a significant role in protecting natural degradation and sustainable development. For instance, India has been an important case where women have showed their green activism in various movements like Chipko movement and Narmada Bachao movement. Thus, the need of the hour is promoting gender green policymaking and incorporating women's voices in the environment concerning the decision-making process.

Key Words- Environmental Degradation, Gendered responsibilities, Sustainable Development

Introduction-

How do we conceptualise environment as a security issue. What is the relationship between the environment and women? Are the impacts of environmental degradation gendered? Are we need of a gender lens to understand this relationship? Is there any role of women in sustainable development? How can women play an important role in saving environmental degradation? These are some questions that are matters of great debate. This paper tries to deal with these questions in a broader theoretical context.

Environmental Security: A Growing Discourse

The concept of security has long been dominated by the mind of scholars of international relations. The term security is the combination of two Latin words *Sine* and *Cura*. *Sine* means without, and *Cura* stands for concern or fear. So literally security translated as without fears or concerns. Before World War II and during the cold war, the notion of security was understood in terms of protecting its population and territory from other external military forces. Realists are of the view that constant struggle for power is inevitable because the international system is characterised by anarchy. Anarchy means there is no supreme authority in global politics that can constrain the behaviour of states. Anarchy in international politics realm makes the rule of self-help logical that force states as a unit to maximise their security.

The interpretation of security changed significantly, or in Kuhn term, a paradigm shift took place in security understanding with the breakdown of the bipolar geopolitical world marked by the Cold War. Realism or neorealism has become no longer a dominant theoretical instrument for understanding the real picture of world politics. Many new approaches such as constructivism, feminism and post-modernism emerged in this new geopolitical environment. The advocates of these approaches questioned the narrow conception of security based on military power. These attempts seek to broaden the concept of security by making various non-traditional threats as the subject of security analysis. The conception of security is being defined far wider and deeper than before both in its object and content (Smith, 2011).

So, in the contemporary world, the concept of security is not considered only in terms of hardcore military threats and the state is also not the only basis of analysis in security consideration. The notion of human rights has become dominant discourse within security studies where security refers to protection or freedom from threats or risks that question the very survival and well-being of individuals or community. Among major human security threats, environmental degradation is the most devastating security challenge that has massive negative consequences. It is too when it is known to the people that the disbalance in the ecological settings has the enormous capacity that can cause the destruction of the whole ecosystem of the earth. In this backdrop, environmental security has become a serious concern across the world among the policymakers and even ordinary people. In academic discourses, threats emanated from environment degradation began to be incorporated into broader security conception. It is also to be noted that Environmental security discourse attacked by scholars who criticised the broadening or elasticity of the security understanding beyond traditional military concern (Diehl, 1998). For some scholars, securitisation of environmental problems is the reflection of the militarisation of thinking regarding the relationship between humanity and the environment. On the other hand, some argued that non-traditional threats like environmental degradation demilitarise the notion of security (Graeger, 1996).

The debate regarding environmental security is intense on the conceptual ground, but increasing ecological concerns cannot be ignored (Diehl, 1998). The entire global community, including individuals and nations, are increasingly jeopardised by environmental threats. In the modern age, growing industrialised society has

been degrading natural settings and inviting several environmental insecurities. We depend on nature for our daily necessities, but at the same time, there are various insecurities to human lives emanating from the environment such as storms, earthquakes, floods, drought, volcanic eruptions etc (Buzan, 1997). Global environmental changes are posing a new kind of threats to Human Security and consequently, added an essential dimension to Human Security. The environmental degradation is manifesting in different forms and has far reaching implications for humanity at large.

There is an increasing opinion among the scholars and policymakers that environmental degradation in different forms is growing cause of violent conflict within and between the states. In other words, there is a causal mechanism between environmental problems (Independent variables) and violent conflicts (dependent variables). The link between environmental degradation and conflict is clearly underscored by the significant research work of Thomas Homer-Dixon. In his significant article 'Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflict: Evidence from Cases' (1994), he argued that environmental scarcities added fuel in violent conflicts in many developing countries. In his study, he has identified six kinds of environmental change as the causes of violent inter-group conflict such as greenhouse-induced climate change, ozone depletion, and degradation of agricultural land, loss of forests, contamination and reducing of freshwater supplies and finally loss of fisheries.

Further, climate change and its related phenomenon have led to many severe crises such as water insecurity, food insecurity, health deterioration etc. Increasing water scarcity is showing the pace of climate change and its related phenomenon. There is growing empirical evidence that decreasing ice cover, groundwater, drought and uneven floods are the direct manifestation of climate change. Climate change will impact water issues in many ways in years to come. For instance, the Global Compact report of 2009 highlighted that climate change has severe impact on water scarcity and sustainable supply, water quality and water demand. The World Bank report (2016) shows that 1.6 billion people are living with water scarcity across the world, and this number may twice in just two decades. The Safe Drinking Water Foundation highlighted that in developing countries, 80% of all diseases are due to unsafe drinking water and waterborne diseases (Abedin, Anwarul, et al. 2018 p.28). Climate change has also impact on rainfall pattern that mainly determines water availability in different geographical locations. As the fifth report of IPCC pointed out that climate change has changed rainfall pattern and so water availability in different parts of the world (Institute Global Environmental Studies [IGES], 2015).

On the other hand, food productivity across the world is massively being impacted by the water crisis, which is the direct and indirect result of climate change. Rapidly increasing global population and urbanisation are further posing stress on the food production system. Climate change will have significant impact on agriculture because of growing water demand, limiting crop productivity and reducing water availability. So, stress on agriculture and food productivity will be a significant challenge in future regarding ending hunger and malnutrition. Sufficient and nutritious food to all is the centre point of food security. But unfortunately, global warming and climate change are making quantity and quality of food-insecure rapidly. As per Food and Agricultural Organization [FAO] (2016), about 800 million people are under chronic undernourishment, and 161 million children under five years old are estimated to be stunted. Water crisis and food insecurity are closely related to health-related problems (FAO, 2016, p.1).

International Panel on Climate Change [IPCC] (Fifth Assessment Report) says that due to climate change, health has already occurred in the past, is occurring and will continue to occur in the near future (Semenza, 2014). Environmental degradation is affecting basic health requirements of human being such as potable water, unpolluted air and sufficient food availability. In the coming decades, the health of people across the world would be affected by climate change. UN Climate Change: Learn, (2013) make it clear that climate change has detrimental impacts on the lives and health of billions of people across the world. For instance, since the 1970s to 2004, more than 140,000 annual deaths were due to global warming and an estimated 2-4 billion USD per year will be accounted for health by 2030 (UN Climate Change: Learn, 2004, p.4). These analysis make it clear that environmental degradation is rapidly increasing that poses severe threats to human security. Many reports and data undoubtedly show that environmental degradation has become shocking in recent years. Extreme weather conditions, such as storms, floods and drought are the direct threats of climate change that have gained global priority issues. Further section tries to investigate position of women during environmental catastrophe.

Questions of women in the context of environmental degradation-

The impacts of environmental degradation are different to different income groups, regions and gender. The growing literature on the environment recognises that those people and communities, who are poorest and undervalued, are most likely to be exposed to environmental catastrophe. Due to their lack of adaptive capacities, developing the world and poor people are most vulnerable in the context of environmental degradation. The principal sufferers of environmental degradation are the most underprivileged people, and women constitute the majority. Moreover, worldwide women are engaged in those jobs which are given least importance in the society such as clothing, feeding, caring for all member of the family, etc. these tasks are unpaid and considered less valuable across the world. Although at first glance, the relationship between human society and the physical environment appears to be gender-neutral and impacting both women and men in a similar way, but if we put closer observation, we realise that the relationship is not so gender neutral. The differentiated socio-cultural construction of men and women's roles and responsibility means

that the physical environment impacts differently both male and female. Various issues are making women vulnerabilities worst in the context of increasing environmental degradation and below following sections provide a brief analysis on these crucial issues-

There is also a wide gender gap in family relationship and domestic works, especially in developing countries. They are responsible for water fetching and food and fuel collecting for cooking. Women spend much of their time on the water collecting for their families, which are very considerable for them. But with the lowering of groundwater and fresh water, water issues again become a severe concern for women. Women have to walk an extended area to access water, especially from polluted and contaminated streams which are substantial time-consuming task, and it also involves health injuriousness. Further, in most of the Asian and African countries, rural women and men are generally reliant on biomass resources such as wood, crops and other resources for their energy and livelihoods (UN Women Watch, 2009). But with the loss of biodiversity, women and men are becoming unable to get these essential resources. Generally, fuel collection work comes under women's responsibility, and it is a question and strategy of survival for them. And in the process, they become more vulnerable to health damages because of carrying heavy loads over long distances and have to face a bigger risk of sexual harassment and attack.

The reflection of gender discrimination can also be seen in the sphere of education. It is most evident in developing societies where education of women is not given importance as that of a male member. Education of female children considered at last and lastly offered opportunities to get an education. Further, domestic tasks leave little scope and time for their education. This structure is resulted in ignorance and denying of many basic rights. During disaster time, school drop out of girls is higher because it decreases household expenses on girls schooling or to assist domestic works such as fetching water. A low level of education is a hindrance for women because it denies access to health and disaster-related information or early warning systems (UNDP, 2011). So, because of lack of ignorance and education, they suffer more than men in the time of natural disasters.

There has been greater linkage between migration and environment as many case studies validate this argument. The increasing environmental concerns are influencing human mobility. As IPCC (2007) shows that climate change would have major influence on human settlements as it impacts human health, natural resources and food security (Chindarkar, 2012). People may move temporary or permanent, depending on the extent of the crisis. There are various reasons of human mobility such as social, political and economic. But in recent times, environmentally induced migration has become a major reason for mobility. Global Migration Indicators report 2018 shows that disaster-related displacement has been mainly because of extreme weather events such as flooding and storms. The United Nations Population Fund (2009) argued that migration needs physical and economic capacities that are not distributed equally (Chindarkar, 2012). Due to these issues, the elderly, women and children become most vulnerable in the face of environmental crisis. Socially constructed gender norms influence decision making regarding who moves and who stays? There

are two broader opportunity and challenge views regarding the impact of migration on women. In the first view, it is argued that when man migrates, it provides more space for more freedom of choice and leadership in terms of roles and responsibilities. While in the second view, it is said that in the face of male migration, women suffer more as their workload is increased and even lost their physical emotions with male members.

The report of the International Organization for Migration (2008) is significant to mention here. It says that environment-related migration has complex impact on women and gender dynamics. On the one hand, when they are left behind by male migrants, they may experience more autonomy and decision making power. It is because women now become de facto head of household. The remittances sent by male migrants also enhance the economic power of women. On the other hand, migration of men also makes women vulnerable in many ways. For instance, social taboos hinder them for resource mobilisation in agricultural fields. The report also cited the case of Bangladesh and Pakistan, wherein the absence of male members, women may unable to take major decisions regarding production and livelihood. For performing these activities, women first need permission of their male partners or some other male relatives. Further, in the face of migration, family separateness is felt by the wife and children on the one side and the migrant male on the other. The wife and children loss emotional security which male member generally provides. They lost all those protection that has had from her husband and now this protection no longer available to her. So, migration further worsens women conditions within and outside the home.

Gendered discrimination in terms of holding property and assets again make women vulnerable during disasters. In other words, women are also economically weak and have generally no hold over family assets and property and so fewer resource to survive. For instance, in drought-hit rural Ecuador, landholding men are more often migrate, while women are not able to do this because they are not capable to afford mobility (Sierra Club and UN Women 2018). The report also highlighted the case of Bangladesh, where poor people generally migrate for job while leaving the majority of women to home with domestic responsibilities, including agricultural tasks. On average women constitute 43% of the labour force in farming and in some parts of Asia and Africa, the number is 50-60% (Deliver for GOOD, 2018, p.1). When women migrate in the face of disaster, they are likely prone to face increased cases of trafficking and forced prostitution. So, the impacts of migration on gender dynamics are very complex. However, it can be said that migration has enormous negative repercussion on women. In the context of gender-specific impacts of migration induced by climate change, gender mainstreaming into decision-making processes can be instrumental in sustainable development.

A culture of violence is bred due to environmental conflict and most vulnerable people are likely to be victimised most (Perry et al. 2011). Perry further says that several environmental conflicts exacerbate violence having gendered component. For instance, generally, men have weapons, power and position that enable them to plan and operate violent attacks while women are devoid of these things. Gender discrimination makes women worst sufferer of conflict and women's capacity to mitigate conflict is reduced by feminisation of poverty (OECD, 2017). It is evident from the fact that women and children are the most substantial numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons emanating from conflict. As it is said above that climate-related disasters are exacerbating migration and displacement. It is also made clear that migration has unfavourable consequences for women in many ways, especially in developing countries.

And trafficking and sexual exploitation are among the worst consequences of the natural disaster. There are various researches that argue that during and after a natural disaster, women are forced to be exploited and trafficked due to several social and economic causes. Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (2009) report says that in post-disaster, a widow can also be bound to become primary household earner despite having numerous domestic tasks. It increases the risks of trafficking and forced labour. So, there is general agreement among experts that women and girls are highly exploited regarding sexual abuse, trafficking and domestic violence during natural disasters. Gender-based violence is the clear manifestation of patriarchy and masculinity. Women are to face violence both at the hands of criminal gangs who are encouraged to do so by the breakdown of law and order and by domestic violence. During and after natural disaster, women are subject to several kinds of domestic and sexual violence, and the fear of exploitation force them to shelters (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies [IFRC], 2007). As per the Amnesty International report, exchange of sex for food or material goods in many relief camps are common practice for most of the girls (UNEP, 2011). Their report is an extensive study of human trafficking issue worldwide. It argued that human trafficking is a worldwide crime and constitute a kind of slavery in modern time. People affected by crime are subject to several kinds of physical and mental abuse and deprivation of autonomy, freedom and choice. The report highlights that these sorts of conditions are worst gender-based violence as natural disaster disrupt local and administrative security and led to an upsurge in stress in the family.

The worst health of women is the culmination of the above-mentioned factors. Water scarcity, agricultural and industrial chemical and other major pollutant affect women and men in dissimilar ways. In comparison to men, it is women who devote more time and energy in many domestic, family and agricultural tasks. Women are also highly exposed to indoor pollutant because they spend more time indoors. Women and children are affected by the soot that originates from burning biomass fuels for the cooking food. So they are more prone to many diseases such as asthma, lung cancer and pregnancy-related problems. For instance, as per various studies, following disasters, women face early pregnancy loss, premature delivery, complications and infertility (Ferris, 2010). The persistent uses of chemical pesticides primarily increased the use of DDT

negatively affect women health. DDT causes female infertility and contaminated breast milk. DDT is very significantly explained by the work of Carson.

Thus, because of the reproductive system, women have a different experience of the natural disaster. Women and girls also have to face restrictions to get healthcare services as they have less control over economic and other assets and cultural and societal limitations on their movement prohibit them from travelling to seek health care. Regarding food intake, women and girls are also given less priority. Women generally experience the worst form of malnutrition as conservative social norms deny an impartial intake of food (Sorenson, Cecilia, et al. 2018). During a disaster, when sufficient food is not available, women and girls are hit very much and become the primary victims. Scholar like Sorensen, Cecilia, et al. (2018) argued that physically, women at every stage of age lack more calories relative to men that enhance their health vulnerability during resource shortage emanating from catastrophe. Further, they argue that during extreme events like cyclone and flood, women are more prone to die, and the case of 1991, Bangladesh cyclone prove this phenomenon where women constituted 90% of victims died. And this gendered mortality has been more severe when women belong to lower socio-economic status. The tsunami of 2004 in the Indian state of Gujarat is another example where cultural factors increased the death toll of women, and their death rate was three times more than men (Katayoun et al. 2014). As it is said that conflict enhances sex and gender-based violence, and this situation widens the gender gap and increase the vulnerability of reproductive health (OECD, 2017). So, women's life expectancy is vulnerable in the backdrop of natural disasters.

For instance, Murrilo and Tan (2017) argued that women's socio-economic backwardness is the primary reason for the lower life expectancy of women during natural disasters in the Southeast Asia region. They further say that higher exposure and lower capacity of adaptation regarding threats of climate change contribute negative impacts of natural disasters on the life expectancy of women. And this structure denies women participation in decision-making process even related to those issues that are critical to their interest. Women are considered second class species among human being despite the fact that they constitute fifty per cent of the population. No rights or fewer rights to the decision-making process led to the alienation of women, and this denies their voice to be heard on their interest or welfare. UNDP (2011) report highlight that women are not adequately represented in decision making that hinder their ability regarding adaptation and mitigation. Limited participation in decision making clearly indicates that women's needs, interest and suggested solutions are often ignored. Numerous summits and literature on the issue of climate change called for the importance of integrating gender concern and women's participation in various discussions and procedures. Women representation is worst in developing countries. Moreover, although women have a central role play in sustaining environment and livelihoods, but hardly any specific adaptation efforts, policies, and institution are made for them.

Conclusion-

Above following points exposes how the vulnerability of women is gradually increasing with the degradation of the environment. It is due to their specific socio-economic situations that they are confronting. There is a direct link between their lower socio-economic status and adaptive- mitigative capacities in the backdrop of environmental degradation. It is highly advisable that specific concerns of women must be visible in the policies regarding ecological mitigation and conservation. Additionally, international organisations and national governments should recognise the significant roles that women can perform for conservation of nature. And, there is need of awareness for above mentioned issues across the world in order to secure sustainable development both in spirit and practice. As it has been said that girls and women are not only vulnerable to climate change and environmental degradation but also well situated to provide solutions for several ecological problems. The argument is proved when we see various environmental based movements particularly in India has been initiated and lead by women. So these positive role of women must also be recognised and voiced in policy making.

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