



Relationship Of Women With Environment: An Exploration Of Ecofeminist Ideology And Indian Ecological Movements.

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Abstract

Women are the pillars of society. Though their contribution to the social, political and economical plethora is not given priorities, their contribution to the household activities can't be denied by anyone. Due to the existing gender roles in the society, women are always expected to be within the four walls of their own homes. Perhaps, this results in more inclination of women towards the environment. Because women rely on the environment for their household chores- starting from cooking to relaxing. Women are the best collectors of natural resources. They depend on natural resources such as water, trees, land etc for their household chores. Hence, the loss of the environment directly impacts the lives of women. Forest is considered one of the most important natural resources and it becomes mandatory to preserve and conserve it. It is important for maintaining the ecology and women play a very vital role in its protection. The destruction of the environment mostly affects women as they are the most attached to the environment. Women are the active agents of conservation and restoration of the environment . Globally researchers have been trying their level best to link gender equality with a balanced environment and to portray how degrading environmental situations can result in the enhancement of men- women gap as well as refusal to women's rights. For example, countries with more women in their parliaments are likely to set aside protected land and ratify environmental treaties. The main reason behind examining the issue of women and environment is to show the role of women in the development of a balanced sustainable environment. For example, in India women are seen to be attached to a forest.environment sometimes for household chores and sometimes due to their

mother's kind of love. This paper tries to show the relationship between women and the environment, various environmental movements etc.

Keywords: Environment, women, Environment conservation, Environment restoration

Introduction

Women are the active agents of conservation and restoration of the environment. Globally researchers have been trying their level best to link gender equality with a balanced environment and to portray how degrading environmental situations can result in the enhancement of men- women gap as well as refusal to women's rights. For example, countries with more women in their parliaments are likely to set aside protected land and ratify environmental treaties. The main reason behind examining the issue of women and environment is to show the role of women in the development of a balanced sustainable environment. For example, in India women are seen to be attached to a forest environment sometimes for household chores and sometimes due to their mother's kind of love. The world summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, 2002 confirmed the need for gender analysis and gender mainstreaming in all efforts and the recognition of women's land rights. But growing population and technological advancement are continuously putting a strain on the environment and on the country's natural resources. The interdependence of women with nature can be evolved from the following observations

1. Women are having the base and skills for natural resource management.
2. Women are better managers for natural resources
3. Women have sensitivity towards the environment.
4. Women have high ecological consciousness

Women have been regarded as the best caretakers of the environment since ancient days.

Women play the most important role in managing the environment.

This paper is based on qualitative studies. The information in the paper is collected through secondary sources of knowledge, such as books, newspapers, articles, journals, internet, archives etc.

Objectives of the paper

1. To explore how the ideology of ecofeminism can be beneficial in uplifting the status of women in society
2. To know about the various ecological movements in India

Ideology of ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. It emerged in the mid-1970s alongside second- wave feminism and the green movement. Ecofeminism brings together elements of the feminist and green movements, while at the same time offering a challenge to both. It takes from the green movement a concern about the impact of human activities on the non-human world and from feminism the view of humanity as gendered in ways that subordinate, exploit and oppress women."

Ecofeminism and Status of Women

Ecofeminism can help alleviate the status of women in society. There are a number of ways and interconnections which can be used. Some of them are listed below:

Ecofeminism helps in exposing dualisms: Ecofeminists have described a number of connections between the oppressions of women and of nature that are significant to understanding why the environment is a feminist issue, and, conversely, why feminist issues can be addressed in terms of environmental concerns. For example, Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature the way in which women and nature have been conceptualized historically in the Western intellectual tradition has resulted in devaluing whatever is associated with women, emotion, animals, nature, and the body, while simultaneously elevating in value those things associated with men, reason, humans, culture, and the mind. One task of ecofeminists has been to expose these dualisms and the ways in which feminizing nature and naturalizing or animalizing women has served as justification for the domination of women, animals, and the earth.

1. **Helps in improving the living conditions of women:** Another connection between feminism, animal liberation, and environmentalism has been made by documenting the effects of environmental pollution and degradation on the lives of women and animals. Toxic pesticides, chemical wastes, acid rain, radiation, and other pollutants take their toll on women, women's reproductive systems, and children. By documenting the poor quality of life for women, children, people in the Third World, animals, and the environment, ecofeminists are able to demonstrate that sexism, racism, classism, speciesism, and naturism (the oppression of nature) are mutually reinforcing systems of oppression. Instead of being a "single- issue" movement, ecofeminism rests on the notion that the liberation of all oppressed groups must be addressed simultaneously.
2. Ecofeminists believe that we cannot end the exploitation of nature without ending human oppression, and vice versa. To do both, they reason, we must expose the assumptions that support Patriarchy and disconnect our concept of masculinity from that of "power over" others and the rejection and denigration of the "feminine."
3. Ecofeminist suggests that alternatives to Patriarchy are possible, as evidenced in women's and tribal cultures.
4. Ecofeminism claims that both women and nature are dominated and thus stresses the need for a more interdependent worldview. Ecofeminists believe that all living things are essential to the well being of the planet and that humans are not separate or superior.
5. With an ecofeminist framework, Environment Related Consumption research would take a more emancipatory approach. The research agenda would be focused on changing corporate and public policy so that the burden for the ecological crisis would not be placed on women alone. Introducing ecofeminism provides the springboard for research into environmentally-related consumption by reshifting the focus away from the characteristics of buyers and how they may be motivated to buy environmentally friendly products to a more sociopolitical analysis that links women with nature and exposes how they have been forced into the primary role of "environmental housemaids." By exposing this connection, consumer researchers can conduct research that will benefit the female consumer in her quest to be an environmentally-responsible shopper. The term "ecofeminism" is more descriptive of a concern with cultivating an ecological ethic that goes beyond concepts of social justice alone. It has also been suggested that the prefix "eco" is a sop to those masculine- identified greens who cannot handle feminism. It strikes deeper into the core of Patriarchal reason.

Role of women in ecological movements of India

The role of women in various ecological movements emerging from conflicts over natural resources and the people's rights to survival are spreading in regions like the Indian subcontinent where most natural resources are already being utilised to fulfil the basic survival needs of a large majority of people. The intensity and range of ecology movements in independent India have continuously widened as predatory exploitation of natural resources to feed the process of development has increased in extent and intensity. Women and environment are closely bounded and intimate relation between women and nature led to the emergence of theory of eco-feminism, which is a field bridging ecological ethics and feminism that seeks to explore the conceptual connections between environmental degradation and sexist oppression. Women through their role as farmers and collectors of water and fire-woods have a close connection with their local environment, women and children as well as marginalised sections are the prime victims of environmental degradation especially at times of natural disasters. Women have been involved in several governmental and non governmental forestry and environment programs.

These are –

1. Chipko movement
2. Community forestry programs
3. Social forestry programs
4. Individual conservation programs
5. SHGs conservation programs
6. Green belt movement
7. Keep the city clean program
8. Green India clean India programs

The role of women in the restoration and conservation of forest can be well observed through their role in various ecological movements. These are elaborated in the detailed manner following –

1. **Chipko Movement:** The Chipko movement was an ecological movement, with its focus on preservation and conservation of forests, started in 1973 in Gharwala division of Uttar Pradesh. The collective mobilisation of women in this movement has brought about a situation of conflict regarding their own status in the society. They started demanding their share in the decision making process along with men. On one hand women were fighting for their own rights and on the other hand for the cause of a social movement. The Chipko movement was a process of women's participation. This movement very well shows the connection between women and the environment, how loss of environment can enhance the degrading status of women and hence make women conscious of their rights.
2. **Appiko Movement:** The Appiko movement is also an important social movement started in Karnataka in 1983. This movement was launched against the governmental policy to open forest for industrial development. In consequence, several men, women and children hugged trees. The role of Mahila Mandal is quite relevant here including the role played by Adivasi women.
3. **Silent Valley Movement:** Silent Valley was one of the important biodiversity hotspots in the Southern end of Western Ghats in Kerala in 1976. This silent valley movement was against the decision of the government to construct a dam for hydroelectric power project in silent valley forest led by Sugatha Kumari. In account of several protests and the active role played by women, the forest was declared as a National Park.
4. **Narmada Bachao Andolan:** The Narmada Bachao Andolan is perhaps the longest living Gandhian non violent movement in the history of the world started in 1985 in areas around the Narmada River. The river is witness to a great struggle of ordinary people using forgotten Gandhian tools and reinterpreting them. Nari Shakti Ka Sanman was the most significant slogan of the movement. Even women were ready to compromise their life for the sake of the river and to prohibit the construction of dams.
5. **Navdanya Movement:** Navdanya was the largest organic movement in 1984 as a program of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, a participatory research initiative to provide direction and support to environmental activism. Navdanya means nine crops that represent India's collective source of food security. The main aim is to save seeds from biopiracy. Most of the members of Navdanya movement were women farmers from various parts of the country. Hence, some of the most iconic environmental movements- the Chipko movement, the Navdanya movement, the Narmada Bachao Andolan originated in India, helped by women who were breaking new ground.

Among them some women environmentalists who truly deserve a mention are - Amrita Devi, Gaura Devi, Medha Patkar, Maneka Gandhi, Vandana Shiva etc.

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Conclusions

Forest is considered one of the most important natural resources and it becomes mandatory to preserve and conserve it. It is important for maintaining the ecology and women play a very vital role in its protection. The destruction of the environment mostly affects women as they are the most attached to the environment. Now in the present era women's role is recognized in every field so their role in ecology management must also be recognized to accelerate the active participation of women. Because, women in rural areas are more linked with natural resources and conservation than men. Their traditional gender roles bring them in daily contact with natural resources such as land, water, forest and wildlife. It is seen that women's contribution leads to better following of rules and a greater transparency in working in any field. It even leads to an improved conflict resolution and improved observance.

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