

# ECOFEMINISM : ROLE OF WOMEN IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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## **Abstract**

Recent studies on women and environment have shown that women are significant actors in natural resource management and they are major contributors to environmental rehabilitation and conservation. In addressing some key environmental problems, women play a dominant role. Women, through their roles as farmers and as collectors of water and firewood, have a close connection with their local environment and often suffer most directly from environmental problems. Women's direct contact with environment has produced them deep- knowledge about the environment. Thus, women have served as agriculturalists, water resource manager, and traditional scientists, among others. Women are not only knowledgeable about the environment, but they are also protective and caring. Women, being primarily responsible for domestic and household management, interact more intensively with the natural environment and build the environment more than men. Consequently, they are more likely to suffer. Over-exploitation of resources like land, water, fuel etc. has resulted in degradation of resources mainly due to industrial pollution, soil erosion, deforestation, urbanization. Therefore, conservation of natural resources and promotion of environment cannot be done without involving the women in planning and training for promoting the values for conservation and promotion of environment. Hence, attempt has been made to assess the role of women in conservation and promotion of environment along with suitable strategy for the same.

## **Keyword**

**Urbanization, Degradation, Enhancement, Conservation.**

## **Introduction**

The term ecofeminism is used to describe a feminist approach to understanding ecology. Ecofeminist thinkers draw on the concept of gender to theorize on the relationship between humans and the natural world. The term was coined by the French writer Françoise d' Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (1974). Ecofeminist theory asserts that a feminist perspective of ecology does not place women in the dominant position of power, but rather calls for an egalitarian society in which

there is no one dominant group. Today, there are several dimensions of ecofeminism, including liberal ecofeminism, spiritual/cultural ecofeminism, and social/socialist ecofeminism.

Ecofeminism addresses the parallels between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women to emphasize the idea that both must be understood in order to properly recognize how they are connected. These parallels include but are not limited to seeing women and nature as property, seeing men as the curators of culture and women as the curators of nature, and how men dominate women and humans dominate nature.

Governments are now seeing the global dimension of a number of environmental problems, such as climate change, ozone depletion, dumping of hazardous wastes, destruction of biological resources and of forests, and the impact of desertification. Therefore, the need to protect the environment becomes imperative. Women have recorded successes in solving environmental problems all over the world. In India, the women realized that degradation of productive land has led to the erosion of top soil; the choking of water drainage was causing salinity and loss of food crops. They collectively lease degraded land and revived them through traditional farming. They are more concerned about environmental protection and ecological preservation. A lot has been said about women activities in environment improvement and protection. Moser (1991) distinguishes between three roles for women:

- i. As managers or maintainers of the natural environment,
- ii. Rehabilitators of the natural environment in the sense of sustainable development, and
- iii. As innovators in the use of appropriate technology in the creation of new environments. .

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 sending to the forests. The women left in the villages; however, protested by physically hugging themselves to the trees to prevent their being cut down, giving rise to what is now called the Chipko movement, an environmentalist.

### **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). Chipko was a forest conservation movement in India. It began in 1973 in Reni village of Chamoli district, Uttarakhand and went on to become a rallying point for many future environmental movements all over the world. 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." 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 axe men ignored Devi and after taking she off they cut down the tree.

### **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 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.

## Conclusion

Environmental education is required for the every citizen for sustainable development . Environmental education will produce change in attitude of the people, as well as impact specific knowledge on the every citizen. This paper has discussed the various ways women have participated actively in environmental protection and natural resource management in order to ensure sustainable use of environmental resources. Women education and access to education for girls should be seen as a policy priority. Educated women will contribute more significantly to bridging the gap between environment and development. Empowerment of women in sustainable human development and in relation to the protection of the environment must be recognized and sustained. 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. 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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