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Role of Indian Women in Environmental Movements

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Abstract

From the time memorial period, the women are playing vital role without bothering their lives in protecting and Conservation of environment. The degradation of environment occurs primarily due to over exploitation of natural resources and over population growth. In many Societies of India, the women are closely connected with nature due to their daily responsibilities like water collection, full gathering, agricultural activities etc. Their intimate relationship allows them to deeply understand the value and vulnerability of natural resources. Consequently, women have often been at the forefront of environmental protection, from grassroots mitigative to national movements, Women have contributed significantly to ecological preservation. Environmental movements have the article focused and highlighted the significant role played by Indian Women in environmental movements. The primary objective is to explore how women in India have actively participated in environmental protection and conservation of efforts. A case study method was adopted and applied for this research paper. The findings reveals That Indian women have historically taken and protecting and continue to take a to leading role in Conservation of environment through grassroots - mitigative and organized movements. Their close Conception with nature and daily dependence natural resources position them as powerful agents. Of change in addressing environmental insecure.

Keywords: Women, environment, conservation, movement and India.

Introduction

Since ancient time onwards Women are playing a vital role without bothering their lives in protecting and conservation of environment. Environment degradation occurs primarily due to the over exploitation of natural resources and overpopulation growth. In many societies, women are closely connected with nature due to their daily responsibilities related to water collection, fuel gathering and agricultural activities. Their intimate relationship allows women to deeply understand the value and vulnerability of natural resources. Consequently, women have often been at the forefront of Environmental protection. From grassroots initiatives to national movements, Women have contributed significantly to ecological preservation. Environmental movements have emerged in various parts of the world, including India, where women have actively organized and participated in efforts to protect forest, rivers and biodiversity. The government of India has also adopted various policies and programmes which include women as decision-makers in environmental policy making. This initiatives aim to increase women's participation at the grassroots level and raise awareness about environmental conservation.

Objectives of the Present Study

The objectives of the present study are-

1. To study the participation of Indian women in environmental movement.
2. To study the role of Indian women for protecting and conservation of environment.
3. To study how Indian women bring environmental awareness among the masses.

Various Environmental Movements in India

There are various environmental movements that take place in India where women take a leading role for the protection of environment. They are -

Bishnoi Movement

The Bishnoi movement was found by Shree Guru Jambheshwar (1451-1536) so it also known as Jambhoji. The Bishnoi movement is a social movement led by Amrita Devi Bishnoi in 1730. The movement was founded in response to a massive deforestation program carried out by the rules of Marwar in 1485 in Indian state of Rajasthan, following a severe drought that had lasted seven years.

In this movement Amrita Devi, a Bishnoi women, led 363 villagers in protest against the felling of Khejri Trees to build a palace for the Maharaja of Marwar. The community founded by Guru Jambhwar had 29 tenets, known as 29 principles, the principle of protecting trees and animals. The Bishnois are strictly against killing animals for food or sport. They believe that all life is sacred, human have no rights to kill any living thing, whether an animal or a plant. They have been regarded as the first world's ecological community because of their sustainable lifestyle and emphasis on environmental protection. The cutting of trees and hunting of animals are strictly prohibited for the community members. The Bishnois are primarily dairy farmers and are known for their dairy products and soap making skills. They also cultivate wheat, maize, millet cotton jowar and bajra.

Chipko Movement

Chipko Movement is a forest conservation movement. One of the first environmentalist movements which were inspired by women was the Chipko Movement. So it is also called a women's movement. The word Chipko comes from a Hindi word means 'to stick' or 'to hug', where the people of Uttarkhand hugged the trees to prevent the king's men from falling down the trees which leads to loss of lives during this protest. The protest started on 26, March in 1974 in Chamoli district, Uttarkhand, India. Sundarlal Bahuguna and his wife who spend their life as environmentalists in educating the villagers to protect against the destruction of the forest. He was the leader and started the Chipko movement for the conservation of forests in the Himalayas. The real roots of the Chipko Movement go back to 1730, when Amrita Devi led the movement to resist soldiers from cutting down the Khejri trees, on the order of the Maharaja of Marwar, district Jodhpur, state Rajasthan in her native Khejarli village. Amrita refused to pay the bribe demanded for the tree, saying "If a tree is saved even at the cost of one's head, it's worth it" and was killed for her act of bravery. Later more people stood up to protect the trees resulting in 363 deaths before the Maharaja ordered the felling of trees to be stopped. Vandana Shiva, is credited with bringing ecofeminism into public consciousness by her report of the Chipko Movement. The Chipko Movement also led to the formation of anti-alcoholism. Chandi Prasad Bhatt an environmentalist and Gandhian social activist led the first Chipko movement near the village of Mandal in 1973 and organized rallies to protect the forest from mass destruction. Ghanshyam Raturi during this movement made a slogan "Embrace the trees and save them from being felled. The wealth of our hills, save them from being looted". Some of the strong and main participants in Chipko movement were Dhoom Singh Negi, Bachni Devi, Gaura Devi and Sudesha Devi. Gandhian activist Sundarlal Bahuguna gave a direction to the movement and is appeal to Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, resulted in the ban of cutting trees.

Silent Valley Movement

Silent valley movement was a social movement aimed at the protection of Silent Valley, an evergreen sub-tropical forest in the Palakkad district of Kerala, India. It was started in year 1973 by an NGO led by Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad to save the Silent Valley Reserve Forest from being flooded by a hydroelectric project. The movement started as a wildlife conservation project. Silent Valley is famous for the rare species of animals and birds found there. The forest is densely forested and has deep forests, this causes no noise in the forest

except the birds and insects, this is the reason this valley is known as Silent Valley. The Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad started the movement to stop the construction of the project. The project was then endorsed in the legislative assembly. Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad launched a booklet named 'The silent Valley Movement Hydroelectric Project-A techno-economic and socio-political assessment'. In 1979, the then Prime Minister of India ordered the state government to cancel the project. In these movement women also plays a great role in conservation of biodiversity or water resource or against the construction of Hydroelectric Project.

Green belt Movement

Green belt Movement was founded by Nobel Prize Winner Wangari Maathai in June 1977. This movement is one of the biggest in women and environmental history. The main aim of this movement is to empower communities, particularly women, to conserve the environment and improve livelihoods. This movement started with a few women planting 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.

Jungle Bachao Andolan

Jungle Bachao Andolan was started in March 1982. This Andolan started in Bihar and later spread in the Singbhum District of Jharkhand and Orissa. It was against the government's decision to replace the natural Sal trees with highly priced Teak plantations. This Andolan was led by Chandni Prasad Bhatt and Sunderlal Bahuguna. It was a people's revolt against mindless deforestation. The achievement of this Andolan goes far beyond the goal of 'Saving the forest'. It has turned out to be a popular movement, through which indigenous peoples are asserting their rights and identities.

Appiko Movement

Appiko Movement was founded and led by an environmental activist Panduranga Hegde. This movement was started in September 1983 in the village of the Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka Province in southern India. The women and youth of the region decided to launch a movement similar to Chipko movement. The movement was named as Appiko which means "hug" in Kannada, symbolizing protection for the tree. Men, women and children of Salkani 'hugged the trees' in Kalase forest. Appiko Andolan gave birth to a new awareness all over southern India. In 1950, Uttara Kannada district forest covered more than 81 percent of its geographical area. The deforestation in the Western Ghats has caused severe problems for all southern India. The Appiko Movement is trying to save the Western Ghats by spreading its roots all over southern India. The Appiko Movement is struggling to save the remaining tropical forests in the Western Ghats. This Movement uses various techniques to raise awareness, foot marches in the forests, slideshows, folk dance, street play and so on. The movement has achieved a fair amount of success, the state government has banned felling of green trees in some forest areas only dead, dying and dry trees are felled to meet the local requirement.

Navdanya Movement

Navdanya means 'Nine Seeds'. So this movement is also known as 'Nine Seeds Movement' (symbolizing protection of biological and cultural diversity). This movement also give 'New Gift' to the local farmers to move away from growing

any genetically modified organism on their land and return to organic, chemical free practices. In today's context of biological and ecological destruction, seed savers are the true givers of seed. This movement began in 1984 as a program of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology (RFSTE). This movement was founded by an environmentalist Vandana Shiva, to provide direction and support to environmental activism. Navdanya is a women-led gender sensitive movement, which puts women first. Our gender program called Diverse Women for Diversity seeks to strengthen women's grassroots movements and provide women with a common international platform to air their views. Navdanya Farm started in 1994 in the Doon Valley in the lower elevation Himalayan region of Uttarakhand province when she realized that they needed a farm for demonstration and training.

Narmada Bachao Andolan

Narmada Bachao Andolan is an Indian Social movement spearheaded by native tribals, farmers, Adivasis, environmentalists and human rights activists and people established on the bank of the Narmada River. The main objective of the movement is against a number of large dam projects across the Narmada River, which flows through the states of Gujarat, Madhya and Maharashtra. This movement was led by a popular Environmentalist Medha Patkar and Baba Amte in 1985 to protest against the lack of an appropriate resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R) policy for more than 250,000 people faced submergence during the construction of big dams (Sardar Sarovar Dam) along the Narmada River. The Narmada Bachao Andolan could halt the building of the Sardar Sarovar Dam from 1994-1999. The National Alliance for peoples' movement was formed. On October 2000, the Supreme Court gave the approval for the construction of Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Indian Narmada River located in the village of Kevadia in the state of Gujarat. The court decided that the height of the dam be raised to 90 meters. Above all these environmental movements, the Indian as well as Assam Government has also taken some Policies and Programmes for protecting and conserving the damage environment. In 2014 Govt. of India has launched Green India Mission to increase green cover and protect biodiversity. For Eg.- The Forest of Bishmuri area under Haltigaon Division (of Forest), Kokrajhar District has been deforested, but now the government of India/Assam has engaged 135 TA (Territorial Army) from 2000 onward for replanting trees in that locality. As per my observation they are now planting down the trees time to time in that locality. In 8th June 2023, Assam Govt. also launched Amrit Brikshya Andolan as a major Tree-plantation programme across Assam aiming to plant 1 Crore seedlings.

Some policies and programmes adopted by the Indian government for protecting and conserving the damage environment are -

- a) The Indian Wildlife Protection Act 1972 protects the biodiversity.
- b) Water Prevention and Control of Pollution Act, 1974.
- c) Air (Prevention) and Control of Pollution Act, 1977
- d) Forest Conservation Act, 1980.
- e) Environment (Protection) Act 1986.
- f) The National Forest Policy 1988 had conservation as its fundamental principle.
- g) Public Liability Insurance Act 1989
- h) Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act 1992 for control of biodiversity.

- i) Biological Diversity Act, 2002.
- j) National Green Tribunal Act, 2010.

According to Article 48(A) of the Indian Constitution, the state shall try to protect and improve the environment. It should also endeavor to safeguard forests and wildlife of the country. Again according to Article 51(A)(g) of the Indian Constitution, every citizen of India has a fundamental duty to protect and improve the natural environment including forest, lakes, rivers and wildlife and should have compassion for living creatures.

Suggestions

- a) More and more women decision makers, planners, advisers and managers to environmental movement should be increased.
- b) Environmental education should be expanded in rural areas to bring awareness among women.
- c) 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.
- d) The Government, Non-Governmental Organizations, Environmental Conservation agencies should recognize and mobilize women as active participants to protect and enrich the environment or natural resources that sustain us.
- e) The potential of Science and Technology should be utilized to solve environmental related problems.
- f) Women should be taught to use solar cookers and improve water management.
- g) Women when mobilized play a significant role in Environmental movement or protection.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that women play a significant role in environmental movement in India, reflecting their integral leadership and deep connection with nature. These movements not only highlight women's active participation but also help to foster a positive attitude among the masses towards environmental protection, preservation and conservation.

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