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# Role Of Women In Environmental Movement In India

**Upama Saikia** Department Of Political Science Email.Id.Upamasaikia1234@Gmail.Com

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## ABSTRACT

Environmental movements are organized from time to time in various parts of the world for the protection and conservation of environment. Environment is degraded due to the over exploitation of natural resources and over population growth. Human beings have been posing threat to the environment to fulfill their own needs. Women have been playing a vital role since ancient time without bothering about their lives. Women have always been close contact with nature for their household management therefore they can better be understanding the pain of nature and always been overprotective towards nature. Various environmental movements like Bishnoi movement, Chipko Movement, Aapiko movement, Silent valley movement and Narmada Bachao Andolan are the significant environmental movement of India that reflect the integral leadership of women. Women always plays a pivotal role whether it was conservation of biodiversity or water resource or against the construction of hydroelectric project. The government of India has adopted various policies and programmes which include women as decision-makers when making environmental policies by increasing women participation in the grassroots level and spread awareness towards conservation of environment. But India long miles to go to make equitable gender sensitive environmental policies in true sense.

**Keywords:** Environmental movement, women, water resource, grassroots level, gender sensitive.

## INTRODUCTION

India is considered itself as mother of earth. As a mother nurtured their children, take care of her children in their womb, like wise earth also take care of its people reside in it. But the super animal human being has been aggressively exploiting the very natural environment to fulfil their own needs. Overpopulation and technological advancement are continuously putting threat to the environment and exploits the natural resources. At the same time some conscious people regarding environment those we can call environmentalist raise their voice for the protection and conservation of environment. Therefore, time to time environmentalist has been started environmental movement in all over the world and India is not exception of it. Though environmental movement in India has its recent origin but it

has intensified rapidly from the last few decades. This paper analysis the role of women in environmental movement. Women are very close to nature and they are more sensitive to the degradation of environment as they are mostly depend upon the nature for the management of household and conserving resources for their family. Women are considered as a weaker section of society, but they play a significant role in raising voice against environmental degradation with the advancement of education and technology. Women in India largely visible in the movement against deforestation and in conserving water resource. Here we can cite some very important environmental movement in India led by women of India.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- i. To study the history of women participation in various environmental movement.
- ii. To understand various environmental movement of India
- iii. To examine Government policies and programmes related to women and environment.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The present study has been based on secondary data include Books, journals, newspaper , government records as well as internet source.

## **HISTORY OF WOMEN ROLE IN ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT IN INDIA**

With the growing environmental crises, the women become as an agent for the environmental conservation. The women participation in environmental protection can be traced back to 1731, near jodhpur, Rajasthan by the Bishnoi women. Amrita Bai of Khejarali village sacrificed her life as she embraced the Khejri tree as the Bishnois regarded this tree as sacred. As a consequence, there was strong resistance spread in the village. Amrita Bai and her band of women Bishno is can be considered as the first environmental movement of the world. In general, one of the first ecological movement started in Champaran District of Bihar in 1917 led by Mahatma Gandhi, against the indigo cultivation of British planters without giving payment for it and finally plantations were abolished. Secondly, Salt satyagraha movement was also led by Gandhiji in 1930 against British Salt tax monopoly. In both of these movement women had vehemently participated as well as supported but mostly they were from urban areas. It was from 1970s the women of rural India came in to forefront. In 1972, Chamoli district in Uttarakhand, Chipko Movement had started by Sundarlal Bahuguna and Bachni Devi and Gaura Devi, these two women environmentalists played a significant role. Another environmental movement movement was Silent Valley Movement in 1978, on the Silent Valley, Palakkad district of Kerela. Here also Sughatha kumari a women poet had played an important role. The movement was against the construction of hydroelectric project to conserved the evergreen forest runs through silent valley. In 1982, Navdanya movement had started by environmental activist Vandana Shiva. It

was an ecofeminist movement as she established Navdanya, an organisation promoting biodiversity and engaging women. Again in 1983, Aapiko movement had started by the villagers of Uttara Kannada district of Karanataka province in southern India shows a large number of rural women participation. The movement was against the commercial forest policy which had caused the destruction on ecosystem of the Sirsi forest. Another most significant environmental movement where women had played a pivotal role is Narmada Bachao Andolan. In 1989, under the leadership of Medha Patkar, had launched this movement against the construction of Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada River, Gujrat .

Currently, there are many more environmental activist who has been working vehemently for the protection and conservation of the environment. Among them Padma Shri award winner Sunita Narain, who focuses on sustainable development and fighting climate change. Another Padma Shri award winner Jamuna Tadu, who is known as 'Lady Tarzen' of Jharkhand forest. She along with 100 Adivasi women has been protecting Jharkhand forest from mafia from last 20 years. Radha Bhatt, who started Nadi Bachao Abhiyan in 2008 opposing construction of hydroelectric power project which has created the devastation of river Ganga as well as damaged the ecosystem of all tributaries adjoining of it.

### **BISHNOI MOVEMENT**

The first ever environmental movement is not only in India but also in the world had started in 1731 where women sacrifice their life to save trees. It was in Khejarli, Marwar region of Rajasthan, Amrita Bai along with other women embraced the Khejri trees from cut down by the king's soldier for a new palace. As Bishnois community had consider this khejri trees as sacred. They proclaimed that a chopped head is cheaper than a felled tree. Hence, Amrita Devi, who lead the movement along with other villagers lost their life to save trees. There were 363 villagers were killed by the soldiers for the check of protection of trees. At last the king cease the operation and designated Bishnoi as protected area which is exist as same till now.

### **CHIPKO MOVEMENT**

It was in 1973, when in Uttrakhand's Chamoli District the entire ash tree was allotted to the Simon Company for commercial purpose. The same forest had been petitioned by the villagers to make their agricultural tools which had denied. The movement was led by Sundarlal Bahuguna, Gura Devi and Sudesha Devi. Chipko (a hindi word, meaning "to hug" or "cling to") which was used to describe the local women was literally hugging the trees from cutting by the loggers. Gaura Devi referred to the trees as her "maika" (mother's home) and invited the loggers to shoot them instead of harming the forest. Similarly, Sudesha Devi spearheaded the women's drive to protect the Rampur forest from contractors. This movement helps the women to organize themselves to making their own decisions whereas

Mahila Mandal became the best local networks. After many days of protest, the government canceled the company's permit and granted it to the villagers.

### **NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN**

Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) is the most significant environmental movement in India launched in 1985 against the large Sardar Sarovar Dam project which would be constructed over the Narmada river, which flows through the states of Gujrat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra's project consist of 30 major, 135 medium and 3000 small dams whereas the dam would displace 3,20,000 tribal and submerged over 37000 hectares of forest and agricultural land. Seeing the intensity of the project the NBA was organized under the leadership of Medha Patkar. It was basically a Gandhian way of protest of non-violence as organized satyagraha and hunger strike. As the project was funded by World Bank, after several days of protest world bank withdraw the project in 1993.

### **SILENT VALLEY MOVEMENT**

In 1976, in Palakkad district of Kerala, an ecological movement was started for the conservation of Silent Valley biodiversity hotspot. The movement was against the construction of dam for hydroelectric project which would be submerge the entire moist evergreen forest. The movement was led by Malayalam poet and environmentalist Sugatha Kumari. As a result then, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi called off the silent valley hydroelectric project and after that Rajiv Gandhi declared Silent Valley as National Park in 1985.

### **WOMEN AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES**

There are numerous environmental policies are adopted at the national as well as International level. In India also various policies and programmes has developed by the government, various NGO's and also individually. As women constitute half of population therefore their empowerment is needed to overall growth of the country. To be empowered women need to be part of the developmental policies related to environment as women are very sensitive toward environment. With the growing importance of women in the conservation of environment Indian government undertakes various environmental programmes including women in environmental protection. These are enumerated as follows:

- 1) Environmental Gender Index (EGI), which ranking the countries on how they mandate gender and environment into their policies and planning. It monitors gender equality and women's empowerment in the environmental arena. India's rank is 46<sup>th</sup> out of 72 countries.
- 2) National Forest Policy 1988 and Joint Forest Management (JFM) program of the 1990s mandated that women comprise 33% of the membership of the Vana

Samarakshana Samitis. The reason of this creation was that the problem of deforestation could be well managed if the state Forest Departments worked out joint management agreements with local communities to reforest degraded forest.

- 3) The National Policies for Women 2016 also give importance to women and adopted policies and programmes gender sensitive. As women get equitable ownership of control and use of natural resources and also secure the asset as the poor women can counter poverty.
- 4) Women participation will be ensured in the use of environment friendly technologies and organically grown produce will be promoted to provide viable livelihood options to women.
- 5) Efforts will be made to recognize women rights using forest products under Forest Rights Act and their roles in forest governance will be strengthen.
- 6) Emphasis is given regarding the role of women as stakeholders and custodians of traditional knowledge. As women have been the seed keepers in farming communities.
- 7) All India Radio and National Television are broadcasting various programmes about environmental protection. Environment Education has become part of education system in schools and colleges which developed awareness among people including women about their duty to protect the environment. They should understand the intensity of environment degradation and importance to protect it.

## **CONCLUSION**

The World Bank estimated that environment degradation is costing around 5.7% of the country's GDP every year. History witnessed that how women have been playing an integral part and parcel in conserving and protecting environment which is so much successful so far. In every time they come forward and protect the environment whether it was by tree hugging or doing long time hunger strike without bothering about their life. It is because, women are always close to nature and very much dependent upon the nature. Women have been always considered the symbol of kindness and love. Therefore, being a mother they know the pain when their children get hurt likewise they know the pain of earth when her plants, rivers are damaged. Development is necessary, but it should not at the cost of environment. Development is fruitless without lives and without environment no lives can be exist in the earth. It is need of hour to pay strong attention towards women involvement in the decision making process and making gender sensitive environmental policies.

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