



INDIAN WOMEN' S ROLE IN ECOFEMINIST MOVEMENT : A STUDY

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Abstract : People have depended on nature and its resources for a variety of needs, including food, shelter, and minerals, from the beginning of human history. Regrettably, there has been a history of unrestrained use of science and technology to satisfy human needs, as well as undue exploitation. Many have been advocating for women's protection and good care as a result of recent comparisons between the exploitation and suffering of nature and women. The intricate relationships among gender inequity, environmental degradation, and social justice have been extensively examined by ecofeminism and feminist environmentalism. These frameworks question established ideas of authority and advocate for more equitable, long-term, and harmonious interactions between people, the environment, and one another. Indian customs and culture rely entirely on women. The key to preserving heritage and the environment is women. Numerous feminist movements and thought for environmental and wildlife protection have been founded in India. Indian ecofeminist intellectuals Vandana Shiva, Bina Agarwal, and Vrinda Karart are well-known. They acknowledge that men dominate both the environment and women in patriarchal societies. Numerous significant environmental movements led by women have occurred across the nation. Women are crucial to the global effort to protect the environment. In this paper, the researcher aims to present a few environmental movements in which women have played a significant role.

Keywords : Ecofeminism, Movement, Environmentalism, Connection.

Introduction

The ideal fusion of ecological and feminist elements is known as ecofeminism. It discusses the close relationship that exists between women and nature as well as the similarities in how both are oppressed and subjugated. Françoise d'Eaubonne, a French feminist, first used the word ecofeminism in 1974. Because of its audacious and honest attitude to how it unabashedly stands for women and nature and works to eradicate the exploitation of both, this subject of study is extremely important. It also emphasises the permanent harm that cultural and social standards do to women, their agency, and nature. Genital mutilation, female infanticide, pollution-causing slash-and-burn agriculture, worshipping old, healthy trees, damming rivers to cause floods, and ecological imbalance are a few examples.

According to ecofeminism, women are seen as natural resources by patriarchal regimes, which motivates them to lead environmental initiatives with enormous energy. However, the idea of eco-feminism is not new. Some native tribes, like the Bishnois of India, have long been in tune with the natural world, appreciating its gifts and leading campaigns to protect it.

Chipko Movement

The well-known "Chipko movement," spearheaded by rural women and supported by Sunderlal Bahuguna, a local environmentalist, was well-known for its unusual mode of protest: clinging to trees. In Uttarakhand, India, in the 1970s, there was a movement centred around embracing trees, led by Bachni and Gaura Devi. Hugging the trees until the loggers left, they stopped them from being cut down.

In the nearby regions, this also generated a great deal of awareness and opposition. In rural India, it was one of the most widespread ecofeminist movements. This was also the aim of the Khejarli movement in Rajasthan. The government was constructing commercial systems in the state when the villagers stole wood-cutting machinery from them.

The Indian Chipko movement is a well-known illustration of women's strength. Beginning in the 1970s in the Garhwal Himalaya, the Chipko movement gained international attention during the Narmada Bachao Andolan. The Chipko movement began as a protest against the local people's denial of access to the forest for the purpose of manufacturing agricultural implements, while commercial wood operators were granted permission to enter the forest.

This movement represents a turning point in Indian women's emancipation. Women are referred to as Prakriti and Shakti in India; according to Sankhya philosophy, Prakriti is the ultimate cause of the world. Sankhya Philosophy recognises two ultimate realities: Prakriti and Purusha. According to Vandana Shiva, "nature, both animate and inanimate, is thus an expression of Shakti, the feminine and creative principle of the cosmos, in conjunction with the masculine principle (Purusha), Prakriti creates the world" (Shiva 38).

Shiva acknowledges the tangible as well as intellectual connections between violence against women and the environment. According to Shiva, women in the third world are particularly reliant on nature to provide sustainability for their families and communities. Thus, the devastation of nature turns into the devastation of women's ability to survive. Third-world women possess unique understanding of nature and are particularly reliant on it. Renowned environmental feminist Bina Agarwal is grounded in practical reality and believes that the organisation of production, reproduction, and distribution of goods is shaped by class and gender divisions, which in turn affects how women relate to nature. Renowned economist Bina Agarwal contends that, on the one hand, women in India, particularly those living in impoverished rural homes, suffer gender-specific consequences as a result of environmental degradation. As per her statement, "In the patriarchal thoughts, women are identified as being closer to nature and men as being closer to culture. Nature is seen as inferior to culture; hence women are seen as inferior to men."

The Indian Chipko Movement was among the first environmentalist movements headed by women. The Hindi term from which the word "chipko" originates meaning to "embrace" or "stick together" (with glue). The majority of people think that the Chipko Movement was a 1970s protest movement that helped rescue trees. But the movement didn't really get going until the 1970s. The Maharaja of Jodhpur intended to cut down trees to build his palace, which would have negatively impacted the habitat of thousands of tribal people who lived in the forests. This is when the Chipko Movement actually began in India in the 18th century.

Amrita Devi, a woman, spearheaded the protest against the tree-cutting and stood watch over the trees for several nights with more than eighty other women from her tribe. They were unable to succeed, though, and the king's troops proceeded to chop down the trees. Over the following 200 years, there were several such demonstrations around the nation. Another attempt of this like occurred in 1973 when the state government of Uttarakhand sought to clear trees in a forest in the Garhwal Himalayas. But the women of the tribe bravely stood watching over the trees, giving them hugs as though they were their own children.

It is important to recognise that a woman's relationship with nature is revealed through her "embracing" of the trees. Women view nature as an integral part of themselves and feel compelled to preserve it rather than as a resource or a way to obtain advantages. "You'll have to chop us too if you want to chop the trees," was the meaning behind their act. The men in the hamlet also had a right to the nature; it was not just the women's domain. However, the women were the ones who championed the cause.

After spending days and nights protecting the trees from axe-wielding forest butchers, the campaign ultimately turned out to be a protest against the government's approval of a corporation's commercial logging for future financial gain.

The Chipko movement, spearheaded by an NGO under the direction of Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Sunderlal Bahuguna, took up the catchphrase, "Ecology is permanent economy."

The Chipko Movement quickly rose to prominence as a model for women-led socio-ecological movements in states like Bihar, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, and even Karnataka. Thousands of people in the Himalayas and throughout India have been motivated to work for water management, energy conservation, afforestation, and recycling as a result of the movement in recent years.

The Navdanya Movement

The revolutionary "nine crop," or Navdanya, movement was founded in 1987 by farmer and seed collector Vandana Shiva as a means of achieving food sovereignty. The significance of food security and cultural biodiversity in India was highlighted by this specific campaign. In this quotation, Vandana Shiva captures the strength and beauty of women spearheading environmental movements:

The Navdanya Movement Renowned environmental activist Vandana Shiva sparked the ecofeminist movement in 1982 by bringing back a farming method that prioritised involving women and altering the existing farming system. She started the organisation Navdanya to support organic farming, biodiversity preservation, farmer markets, and consumer access to high-quality food. It should be mentioned that women were always forced inside their houses to take care of household responsibilities, which created the need for them to be involved in farming on a huge scale.

Navdanya, which translates to "nine grains," represents the most significant grains that form the foundation of Indian agriculture. Over the past 20 years, Navdanya has trained over 500,000 farmers in seed sovereignty, food sovereignty, and sustainable agriculture. It has also assisted in the establishment of 54 community seed banks throughout the nation and has established the largest direct marketing,

fair trade, organic network in the nation under its brand. In addition to raising awareness for organic farming, the organisation conducts extensive scientific study on organic food, the dangers of chemical farming, and genetic engineering. In actuality, Vandana Shiva has spearheaded a number of campaigns to support farmers. The sixty-three-year-old woman is an extreme ecofeminist, anti-globalization, and anti-corporate activist. She concentrates her campaigns on socioeconomic concerns related to food and agriculture, and she is against genetically modified food.

Narmada Bachao Andolan :

Large-scale protests against several dams being built across the Narmada River, which flows through sections of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra in India, are known as the Narmada Bachao Andolan. Tribal women and environmental activist Medha Patkar, among the many other tribals, farmers, environmentalists, celebrities, and human rights activists who had joined this movement, had been instrumental in organising the community and bringing attention to the risks that the people might face as a result of the dams' unrestricted construction. Actually, the Narmada Bachao Andolan was started by Medha Patkar in 1989 as a peaceful protest against the government's indiscriminate building on the river.

In addition, she fasted for 22 days in order to save the river. Additionally, the government's effort to harness the waters of the Narmada and its tributaries began with the construction of 30 big, 135 medium, and 3,000 small dams. Huge volumes of water and energy, which are sorely needed for development, would be provided, according to the dam's supporters. The risk of placing so many obstacles in the way of the river's flow, the requirement to treat the community with dignity, and the effects that building dams would have on the local flora, fauna, and tribal people—aside from the obvious effects on the environment and the planet—have all gone unaccounted for by the government.

More than 2,50,000 people have been displaced by the projected Sardar Sarovar Dam and Narmada Sagar. As of right now, the Narmada Bachao Andolan is regarded as one of the strongest mass movements since it began in 1985. Under Medha Patkar's leadership, the movement has grown to become a global demonstration with backing from all NGOs. The subject is being agitated by protestors via the media, hunger strikes, large-scale marches, demonstrations, and the screening of multiple documentaries. Through media, the Narmada Bachao Andolan has even been exerting pressure on the World Bank to revoke its loan for the dam development project.

Conclusion :

However, ecofeminism frequently ignores the interrelated material foundations of domination rooted in political and economic power in favour of attributing the dominance of women and nature primarily to ideology. People like Dr. Vandana Shiva, whose work 'Staying Alive' has brought attention to the condition of women and the environment, have made a big difference. On the other hand, academics such as Bina Aggarwal have emphasised the complex interactions between caste, class, economy, and gender relations in defining women's status that extends beyond their duties as carers and nurturers. Many social, cultural, and environmental movements have seen the active participation of women; a recent example of such a movement is the Chipko movement in the Garhwal Himalayas. Chipko and other movements have shown the true power of women and their profound worries about environmental issues as well as other social and economic challenges. Overview Feminist environmentalism and ecofeminism are theoretical frameworks that emphasise the connections between gender, ecology, and social justice while integrating feminist perspectives with ecological challenges. According to ecofeminism, patriarchal structures that value power and control are the common root of oppression for both women and the environment. Ecofeminism seeks to challenge and reform these interwoven power structures by highlighting the similarities between the mistreatment of women and the degradation of the environment.

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