

## ROLE OF WOMEN IN FOREST MANAGEMENT

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In India more than 70% population is rural based and their only means of survival is ecology. But in the present scenario the ecology is used for other purposes in the name of development. Forest which is one of the most important natural resource is also used for selfish motive for economic gains. The growth and development in the present era, the forest area is day by day vanishing. With it, environmental degradation is also taking place simultaneously. Women suffer the most, if the forest is degraded as they are the one who uses forest resources for daily purpose. In the past it is seen that they have played a keen role in preventing overexploitation of forests by profit-making interests. There are incidents where women acted as a shield by struggling to protect grazing lands and forests from troublesome developments like mining. Women's participation is valuable for improving yield of ordinary lands. The close relation of the women with the natural resources makes them a constructive and protective force for the environment. Their vital role performed by women can spin vicious circles into worthy ones. Like we can see in the forests of Murgabani village in Pargana district of Bihar where due to overuse by both the local people and the government authorities, the forest was degraded. The women pressurized men to include them in forest protection committee. And now with their efforts the forest has been regenerated.<sup>2</sup> These intertwined bonding with land and natural resources lead to a new culture of reverential use and maintenance and preservation of natural resources and the environment, ensuring that the subsequent generations can meet their needs.

Women work as gatherer, forest dweller and as a manager in forestry. They work in hand in hand with men and even sometimes more than them for instance in survey conducted in West Bengal in 2002 women's contribution in activities like mining, processing, marketing and consumption is 75%, 100%, 67%, 50% respectively and in case of men the contribution 25%, nil, 33%, 50% respectively.<sup>3</sup> The second instance is of the tribal women of Chhattisgarh who uses most of the forest products for food, fodder, medicine, fuel wood, and water and it is the only source of livelihood for them and their management is with hand in hand with men. Where men

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<sup>2</sup> Fiona Flintan, *Joint Forest Management AND GENDER*, (Girija Godbole, September, 2002)

<sup>3</sup> NC Saxena, Women's rights to forest spaces and resources

are more to labor work like cutting trees, the women play a major role in collecting the forest products. Women have more knowledge about forest than men like “Tribal women in India use almost 300 forest species for medicinal purposes.”<sup>4</sup> Their management is very beneficial for the forest but due to overexploitation in the name of development is creating problem for them as well as harming forest.

The numerous roles played by women have created situation whereby they influence and are influenced by the environment. With the degradation of environment and depletion of forests, this relationship becomes increasingly negative: the scarcity of resources increases, demanding more time and energy to secure them. These relations between women and the environment required to be acknowledged, understood and integrated into project development. Women, as well as men, have an extensive knowledge of the forest and its uses, but this knowledge wasn't completely acknowledged and utilized.

We can also observe that women's participation in decision-making is least and limited. Its domain is limited at the household level. At the community level, their participation in decision-making is nearly non-existent. As a result decisions that affect their lives and those of their families are made without their participation. What's more, the experiences and knowledge that women have accumulated about forest management and the environment is rarely acknowledged or utilized. “In Uttar Pradesh, India, for example, 33 to 45% of women's income was generated from forests and common land, compared with only 13% for men.”<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, women's desires and concerns in relation to forest management are frequently neglected, and they have minute authority in determining development activities like in Uttar Pradesh where women obtained 33-45% of their income from forests and common land, compared with only 13% in the case of men. Even given this reality, though, women are often ignored when it comes to developing policies for forest management

In the present era regardless of economic growth in the country, still gender inequalities can be seen in many areas like life expectancy, health or environment. In spite of all constitutional

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibidl*

<sup>5</sup> Understanding the Role of Women in Forestry: A General Overview and a Closer Look at Female Forest Landowners in the U.S.

rights, freedom and equality given to women still they are downtrodden.<sup>6</sup> In the unorganized or informal sector women still struggle hard to get recognition. The customary social constraint of the patriarchal society relegates women to the inside sphere. The women work hard in the informal sector but their work is never recognized and the products are under the control of men domain. Women, despite of one of the main contributor in the economy, they are still invisible to the planner. Women are always put to the subsistence sector rather the economic sector.

Women have a great potential in managing the forest and an active participant and a great manager. In the present research the researcher would highlight the active role of the women in forest management.

Somewhat 85 % of the rural women are dependent on their livelihood from land and water activities. The conditions of the resources are not good enough which lead to the miserable conditions of the people dependent on these resources. So with the economic development it's become very vital to conserve forest .it is observed from past thirty years that there should be a balance between conservation of forest and economic development because any economic development that destroys these resources will create more poverty, unemployment and diseases and therefore cannot be called even economic development.<sup>7</sup> So it's necessary to transfer the resources to poor as they depend on the resources for their daily survival.

There are several instances in the history where people stood to conserve forest where women also played an incredible role with their counterparts to save forest like “Chipko Movement 1873 led by Chandi Prasad where village women resisted, embracing trees to prevent their felling to safeguard their lifestyles which were dependent on the forests. Deforestation could qualitatively affect the lives of all village residents but it was the women who agitated for saving the forests”<sup>8</sup>, Narmada Bachao Andolan 1985, Jungal Bachao Andolan 1980s ,Navdanya Movement 1982. Green belt movement 1977 is one of the landmark movements where this movement led by Maathai focused on “restoration of Kenya's rapidly diminishing forests as well as empowering the rural women through environmental preservation, with a special emphasis on

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<sup>6</sup> Seen from the decline in juvenile sex ration according to census 2011

<sup>7</sup> Supra1

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Mrs. Naresh Yadav, *Women & Environment Sustainability*

planting indigenous trees movement initiated by these Indian women.”<sup>9</sup>This clash began as men wanted to cut the trees to utilize them for industrial purposes whereas women wanted to keep them because it was their only source for food and deforestation was survival stuff for local people.

In the present situation it's very vital to make serious strategies to protect and conserve. There should be development of strategic environment initiative. This postulates that while focusing on technology with high technology should not be made. Emphasis should be given to low technology which constitutes often appropriate technology.<sup>10</sup>SEI should be so designed to set in a process of a forestation. The mankind cannot survive without developing strategic initiatives to plant billions of trees throughout the world particularly in degraded lands. Such a strategy of planting a tree has universal power in every culture and every society on earth, and it is a way for men, women and children to participate in creating solutions for the environmental crisis.

Protection, Conservation and proper management of forest is one of the important and urgent concerns in both national and international forum.

## **WOMEN AND JOINT FOREST MANAGEMENT**

JFM was initiated in 1990. This program has different meaning for different people.<sup>11</sup> As Jeffery Campbell puts it “forester may view JFM primarily as a means to ensure forest regeneration ; community members may see it as a solution to a growing shortage of biomass , a means to ensure daily requirement of food , fodder and Non Timber –Forest –Products , and as away to increase incomes, Ngo activists may view the program me as a vehicle for grass roots empowerment ; academic researchers may see in JFM an experiment in collective action ;while politicians may view JFM as a means to decentralize control over resources”.<sup>12</sup>

The recent development in JFM program is the involvement of women in JFM program where women manage communal forests. In many states, women have taken initiatives to manage their

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*7

<sup>10</sup> Dr JJR Upadhyay , *Environmental Law* , 3<sup>rd</sup> edition , central law agency , Allahabad

<sup>11</sup> AK Poddar, Swayambhu Mukherjee, Debosmita Nandy ,*Forest laws and policies in India*

<sup>12</sup> Sanjay Upadhaya, *JFM in India :some legal concerns , economic and political weekly* , august 30, 2003

local natural resources that affect their daily lives .there are many reasons for this. “In Uttaranchal’s mountain area, the trend started that men started to migrate to different area in search for local salaried employment, so it created space for women.”<sup>13</sup> Empowered by pioneering movement like Chipko and through innovative programs like Mahila Samakhya, all women Van Panchayats and informal women’s committees have come up in scores of villages, particularly in Garhwal region.<sup>14</sup>

In numerous villages of Orissa, men have progressively lost curiosity in supporting community forest protection due to many reasons, one of them being group factionalism.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, highly forest dependent impoverished women have started challenging male domination in the states widespread informal community forest protection groups and have taken up the responsibility.

The superimposition of JFM program in several such villages have often diminished women’s role in looking after the forests. Claiming to promote women’s participation, JFM committees, despite having one third reservations for women, are actually damaging the good work of the already existing women’s initiatives.<sup>16</sup>

There are various incidents in the past which highlighted that women’s role is disregarded.<sup>17</sup> First incident is was in a village in Orissa where a Mahilla Samiti was unofficially caring the forest .The guard during formation of the committee, pointed out that according to the rules only one –third of the committee can be women .After construal it was decided to alter existing all women group to largely male JFM group and management of funds also got transferred to male hands.” even the same condition was in Jharkhand’s Santhal Parganas where 25 women’s groups taking up forest protection was denied permission on the same ground that JFM rules did not permit women only groups .and in third case in Palli village in Pauri Garhwal , women who were already engaged in protection of forest were exhorted to participate in JFM plantation activities .

There are much more incidents were women’s role is not considered and grossly neglected. They should be given adequate access to all the resources and related details and they should be

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*10

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid* 11

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*

allowed to work with hand in hand with the male counterparts. If this is not done then JFM would result to disempowerment of women.

## CONCLUSION

Forest is considered one of the most important natural resource and it's become mandatory to preserve and conserve it. It's important for maintaining the ecology and women play a very vital role in its protection. Women's role is considered as the most familiar manager, collector and protector of forest as we have seen in different instances above in the paper. The destruction of forest mostly affects this group only as their lives are intertwined with the ecology.

Now in the present era as women role is being recognized in every field so their role in ecology management must also be recognized. So to accelerate the active participation of women joint management program has been started to constantly upgrade their involvement. But as we all know that the revolution takes time in the same way it is seen that their contribution in forest management is passive regardless of diverse policy changes. Due to many cultural and other social constraints, women are unable to get involve in effective forest management activities which it one of the vain for the effective forest management.

So at last it is very vital for gender participation in forest management which would accelerate the competence of forest institutions. As we can see in case of Paraswadi, reflection of better condition of the forest this is because women actively participated in the issues related to forest.<sup>18</sup> it is realized that "the knowledge, skills and practices of both of them contribute to the conservation, management and improvement of natural resources"<sup>19</sup> it is seen that women's contribution lead to better following of rules and a greater transparency in the working of the organization. It even leads to an improved conflict resolution and improved observance. So it's important to regard the both genders participation.

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18 Ms. Deepshikha Mehra, *Does lead role of women in local forest governance guarantee gender equity in costs and benefits from forests? A study of four case studies from Vidarbha Region in Maharashtra*

19 *Ibid*