



Women and Climate Change

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ABSTRACT

In today's world, climate change poses the most significant challenge to all of humanity in the coming century. Climate change is caused by global warming due to inefficient energy utilization on account of the rapid growth rate of industrialization. Generally, sustainability requires that the resource base upon which production and consumption activities are based is not jeopardized for future rounds of production and consumption on account of the unsustainable present level of production and consumption. In simple words, sustainability implies a concern for the future in which present-day greed is curtailed to ensure intergenerational equity and justice over an infinite time horizon. Indigenous cultures everywhere have long practiced sustainable modes of living, which, with modern industrialization and capitalist globalization, are being threatened to a greater extent. Climate change affects poor women in developing countries as a consequence of extreme variations in temperature, desertification, floods, rising ocean levels, inadequate food security, etc. The main objective of this paper is to highlight the role of women in sustainable practices shaped by culture and how their roles are being envisioned in climate change solutions.

Keywords: Sustainability, Indian Culture, Women and Climate Change

Introduction

In the 20th century, the relationship between women and environment attains a great significance because women are perceived as victims of environment degradation. It is important to understand that everything in nature is connected and one can never do just one thing as everything we do has numerous effects on nature, which are often unpredictable. Throughout the underdeveloped as well as newly industrializing world,



women have responded to the threats by development projects. In recent years it has been observed that women from poor families are closely dependent on environmental resources like fuel, food and water. Global warming and deforestation adversely effects income generating activities of women in several ways due to climate change in the society. It is believed that there is always a strong interconnectivity among human activities, social and natural environment. Traditionally women playing a vital role as an efficient manager in managing natural resources and possesses a valuable knowledge with regard to the use and management of these resources. But in present scenario of development and implementation of sustainable practices, their participation is negligible which ultimate leads to crisis for their survival in the society. Women are invisible in the formulations of policies, yet implicitly they are expected to play a role in the implementation of these policies.

In Indian context, on the basis of some secondary data i.e. government reports and case studies of different states highlighted that the impact of climate change adversely affect every year due to existence of intensifying heat waves, seasonal changes in monsoons, and other climatic changes related to weather and occurrence of floods and droughts frequently in society. These changes bring vulnerability position of women to a great extent. In the state West Bengal, Darjeeling is called as hub of tea production in India. In recent years due to excessive use of fertilizers to increase the production of tea has affected female tea workers to a great extent as they are being easily available as a cheap laborer for this work. They suffered from severe health problems like breathing problem, loss of power vision, skin affections etc. In spite of the fact that women having vast knowledge and holding years of agricultural experience, they were deprived from property rights and other kind of financial resources. Similarly in Bihar state, women affected due to climate change because of as this state is very much prone to floods. The existence of floods arises too much violence against women and there is an increased rate of women trafficking in the state in the name of marriage, preference of male child and women abuse in flood relief camps. There is an increase rate of women exploitation and violence in Maharashtra state due to climate change. There is massive scarcity of water in the state which basically resulted due to lack of proper water connectivity and occurrence of frequent droughts. So there is a case of water wives which simply means the men of the villages started having more wives and their major responsibility is availability of water in the house. These women belong to poor



economic position and spent their maximum years in fetching water from faraway places.

Objective

The main objective of this paper is to highlight the role of women in sustainable practices shaped by culture and how their roles are being envisioned in climate change solutions.

Research Methodology

The research methodology used in this study is the meta-analysis which is in the form of secondary data taken from different studies like survey reports, research papers, literature review etc. This paper is the narrative review of the exiting literature on women and climate change. A total of 20 articles were retrieved using this method. A careful review of these articles revealed material relevant to identify the role of women in sustainable practices and climate change solutions.

Women and Climate Change

Eco feminists argue that because of women's unique role in biological reproduction their bodies as important 'markers for ecological stress' (Diamond and Orenstein, 1990) environmental degradation impacts upon a number of areas of women's lives. The manner in which environment degradation is experienced by women depends on the definition of women's responsibility in different societies as well as the resources that they have available with which they are expected to meet their responsibilities.

Women and Climate Change in Rural Indian Society

In developing countries, women play a crucial role in food production, and forty-five to eighty percent of the world's population is fed by women. But in recent times, their roles have changed from managers to landless laborers. In various research studies conducted on rural women in India, it was depicted that women and female children are adversely affected by environmental degradation or climate change. The first and foremost factor is the existence of a division of labor, where they were involved in the collection of fuel, fodder, and water. Generally, women do most of the gathering from forests, village



commons, rivers, walls, etc. With the process of deforestation, this task becomes more strenuous as women have to walk long distances to collect fuel. The non-availability of grazing land has increased their problems. In General climate change effects six crucial aspects of women's daily lives, i.e., time, income, nutrition, health, socio-survival networks, and indigenous knowledge (Aggarwal 1992). With respect to time, it was found that women are the main gatherers of fuel, fodder, and water; primarily, their working day is lengthened by the depletion of and reduced access to forests, water, and soils. Water is a vital resource, which is a basic human need. But it is of limited source, as most of it is not consumable. The consumable water is less than 1/3 of the water source available. A safe drinking water supply and basic sanitation are vital human needs for health and efficiency. So the disease and death, particularly of children every year, and the drudgery of women are directly attributable to a lack of these essentials. In India, there are many villages and cities either with scarce water supplies or without any source of water supply. In rural areas, women still have to walk a minimum distance of about 2.5 km to reach the source of water and reach home carrying heavy pots, not to rest but to do other household chores such as cooking, washing, cleaning, caring for children and other family members, and caring for livestock. In other words, water may be used by all family members by the end of the day since it is used for all these purposes. This creates the need for fetching water again by evening. Thus, women's lives are sheer drudgery. With regard to income, it was found that the decline in the gathered items from the forest and village commons has reduced their income automatically. Climate change also cuts women's time. The increased time needed for gathering reduces the time available to women for crop production, and this can adversely affect crop incomes. As the area and productivity of villages and forest commons fall, so does the contribution of gathered food to the diets of poor households. The declining availability of fuel wood has additional nutritional effects. Apart from nutritional effects, she is directly more susceptible to waterborne diseases than men, as they are directly exposed to the pollution of rivers and ponds with fertilizers and pesticides as she performs tasks relevant to nature. Finally, environmental degradation or climate change disrupts social relations among kinsmen, which traditionally provide emotional and social support in traditional roles. There is massive displacement of people due to large-scale deforestation.

Thus, the feminization of agriculture is caused by increased casualization of work, unprofitable crops, the migration of men to non-agricultural sectors, and leaving women



to take up less-paid casual jobs in agriculture. They have poor access and control with regard to the ownership of land and other productive resources. Women faced many challenges with certain dimensions of food security, like food availability, food accessibility, food utilization, and food system stability. The sources of the traditional food system become scarce in nature, and its adverse effects increase the prices of related food products, which become inaccessible for the poor masses, particularly women and girls whose health seems to be declining compared to men during the time of the food crisis.

Women and Climate Change in Urban Indian Society

In urban areas, women also faced different problems due to the change in climate. With the advancement of industrialization, chemicals and other substances are used for the purpose of massive production, which generates a good capitalization market in the country. But on the other hand, these substances adopted for massive production ultimately affect the reproductive system of women in a number of ways. Generally, teratogenic products can interfere with the development of the fetus in the womb. Generally, mutagenic substances can produce genetic aberrations either by affecting the sex chromosomes or the development of fertilized eggs or embryos. These products cause miscarriages or may cause defects that may not change their appearance for many generations. There is a segmental division of labor in the market where women are more likely to occupy lower-paid positions, lack job security, and be employed in typical work practices, including part-time, temporary, and contract work. In simple words, the nature of work basically tends to be routine, unskilled, and badly paid. Due to the existence of this practice of employment, women are less able to raise their voice about environmentally unsafe practices encouraged in the workplace.

The rise of urbanization has increased pressure on sewage systems, waste disposal facilities, and housing quality. The task of child care places women in a position of great sensitivity with regard to building environments. Women are very much affected by deterioration in the built environment in a way that is specific to their role as homemakers, mothers, and caregivers. In order to fulfill the needs of industries, the planning of urban development was very ill in the sense that it was designed in an ad hoc



fashion and little importance was given to the overall coordination of housing, services, and amenities, like a lack of bus services, play spaces, and shops, which were often located at the very edge of the city. In simple words, these developments have served to make women's lives within the home more difficult. Housing designs are insensitive to the needs of children, especially for play space, which makes the task of child care exhausting and often unfulfilling. Similarly, the structures of the houses restrict the mobility of old people, which ultimately adds to the burden, specifically for those who have careers. Space utilization that fails to consider women's needs for personal safety can trap a woman within the home. Basically, these factors enhance the sense of isolation that women experience within the home and act to diminish a woman's self-image.

The quality of housing is also important for health. The poor condition of housing has an adverse effect on children's health. Generally, the location design, planning, construction, and management of the housing environments have been found to have a direct relationship to health. The task of caring for sick children is, by and large, considered the major responsibility of women. Due to overcrowding, dampness or poor heating tend to have more serious health effects on women than men. Overall glimpses of climate change depict that women seem to be more marginalized, probably work harder, have an inadequate diet, and are often at the backstage or denied a voice in political, economic, or social spheres of life. As a consequence, they are more likely to suffer the ill-effects of climate change, environmental degradation, and other environmentally unsafe practices. It is important to note that women are mere helpless victims of climate change.

The decline of biodiversity also affects material welfare and livelihoods; it also cripples access to security, social relations, health, freedom of choice, and actions for women. With the rapid existence of natural disasters like earthquakes, cyclones, floods, tsunamis, heat waves, etc., women are found to be the most affected due to climate change. There were studies that highlighted that such natural disasters kill more women as compared to men.

Climate change generally affects men and women both but differently, and these differences will have a direct effect on family and society at large.

In a nutshell, Indian society is based upon patriarchal ideology, where men are in a dominant position and gendered roles, norms, and values are ascribed in our culture to



women, who face enormous challenges and discrimination in every aspect of life. Due to climate change, women face a higher level of morbidity and mortality, and their role as care providers specifically binds them to the major responsibility of looking after elderly parents and their own children and limiting their mobility to a greater extent. The inaccessibility of information regarding the existence of change in surroundings and the lack of knowledge about lifesaving activities like swimming, etc. place them in a disadvantageous position in society. In general, women are considered a disadvantage compared to men when it comes to confronting climate change because of their negligible participation in decision-making processes, poor access to financial, social, technological resources, etc.

Preventive Measures To Manage With Climate Change

- **Promote an environment-friendly atmosphere:** In order to manage climate change, women must impart education to families with regard to the zero-waste strategy, the use of renewable sources of energy, enhance environment-friendly teaching, and create awareness of recycling products in our society.
- **Active participation of women in the decision-making process:** There is an urgent need to place women as important agents of sustainable development. In order to resolve the problem of climate change and its impact on the environment, it's very important to integrate more and more women in the process and uplift their social and economic status in the
- **Awareness programs to manage climate change:** It is very crucial to generate more awareness programs on the effects of climate change, especially among women, and impart education to handle critical situations in their lives. Apart from that, provide certain extension services to women farmers, like technological innovations, improved storage facilities, and other resource management services. Continuous monitoring should be done on a timely basis by women so as to improve program design and implementation.
- **Adequate provision of training and credit facilities:** In certain allied sectors like sericulture, animal husbandry, dairying, fisheries, forests, handlooms, and handicrafts, etc., more and more women cooperatives should be encouraged to provide training, credit facilities, and other provisions, and they will be able to access the majority of the resources in the future.



- **Environment management:** The concept of environment management must be adopted, which simply means that we must regulate the demands and activities of man in such a way that the ability of the environment to sustain future development remains. It is considered one of the prerequisites for sustaining economic development. In simple words, the main purpose of environmental management is to choose a set of activities with appropriate institutional arrangements and technologies and incentives for achieving whatever goals are basically specified with environmental quality targets.
- **Role of voluntary agencies in environment protection:** Non-government organizations must contribute their efforts to creating awareness, mobilizing public opinion, and building strong people's movements. In simple words, awareness specifically generated by individual women leaders and pioneers and all types of women organizations on environmental issues must emphasize the fact that women and men both have the capacity to manage and protect their environment. The requisite knowledge and information can be disseminated by these non-government organizations to reinforce the self-help potential of women in conserving and improving the environment.
- **Effective climate change policies and their implementation:** Policymakers should make and implement programs and policies that provide women with full and equal access to education and training at all levels with regard to environmental protection and climate change. These policies and programs must consciously ensure and orient women towards new occupations and new roles consistent with their need for self-fulfilment and the needs of social

Conclusion

As we all know, all development activities have a greater impact on the environment, which ultimately brings massive changes in the climate. Now it's high time that environmental issues are tackled systematically by bringing newer innovations in techniques and training change agents. The need of the hour is citizens who are more aware, educated, and active towards solving this sensitive issue, i.e., environmental problems, and conserving the natural resources, which are in limited proportion to the human population. Last but not least, it is the citizenry that enhances the longevity of the planet and is able to ensure the survival of other inhabitants who share this planet with us.



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