
Indian Women and Biodiversity Conservation

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Abstract

This paper explores the theme of Women and Biodiversity. Women play an important role in biodiversity conservation. Relation between women and nature is inseparable. Women are known as guardians of biodiversity. They care about biodiversity and nature since these provide necessary materials that allow families and communities to survive. When we talk about Indian Women, she is deeply connected with nature. From her kitchen to her garden, we will see various activities and plants that represent her connection with nature. Nature is also considered as a Mother or woman in our scripture such as in Vedas, Upanishads, *etc.* We call it “Prakriti”. Women have qualities of nourishment, love, care and share, *etc.* Nature keeps the same qualities in itself. Women take care of nature and conserve all the resources that are required for the health of their families or related to their beliefs or superstitions such as we see “Tulsi” in the “aangan” (Courtyard) of the house. “Tulsi” is considered pious and devout plant. Tulsi (*Ocimum Sanctum*) has its own scientific significance which is directly related to our health. Within Ayurveda, tulsi is known as “The incomparable one”. Mother Medicine of Nature” and the

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“Queen of Herbs”. And is revered as an “ Exilir of Life” that is Without equal for both its medicinal and spiritual Properties.” Women are protectors of nature. We see many examples of it for e.g. Chipko Movement, Save the Forest Jharkhand Movement, Bishnoi Movement and so many others where women played a significant role in saving nature.

Keywords

Biodiversity, Eco feminism, Women, Guardian of Nature.

Introduction

Human beings and nature are inseparably connected with each other's. They both protect each other equally. Women play a significant role in the conservation of biodiversity. They use a lot of wild plants in the kitchen, garden and various places. They know very well the value of the species which is used by them. “The term biodiversity (from “biological diversity”) refers to the variety of life on Earth at all its levels, from genes to ecosystems, and can encompass the evolutionary, ecological, and cultural processes that sustain life.”¹ (<https://www.amnh.org/research/center-for-biodiversity-conservation/what-is-biodiversity>)

“Eco-feminism is an ideology and movement that sees climate change, gender equality, and social injustice more broadly as intrinsically related issues, all tied to masculine dominance in society. Specifically, eco-feminism holds that most environmental issues can be traced back to the global prioritization of qualities deemed masculine (particularly the ones some would regard as toxic, like aggression and domination) and those in power who embody those attributes.”² (<https://www.mindbodygreen.com/articles/ecofeminism-history-and-principles>)

Women use Neem for bathing, and hang it outside of the house which is associated with their faith beliefs. Scientifically, Neem is a medicine plant which is used in various treatments and diseases. Not

only Neem, women have attached various plants and nature through their religious practices such as: Worship of Peepal, Neem, Tulsi, Arjuna, Ashoka, Bel, *etc.* All the plants are linked to the God and Goddess even women acclimatize themselves in nature. Kitchen-garden or home –garden is also being practiced by Indian women. These home gardens harbor various original varieties that are very often taken care of by women. Many plants are used for medicinal purposes by rural women. Many rural women from Madhya Pradesh use a combination of plants as birth control agents. Past evidences showed that women have become victims of development and environmental degradation but as time passed it has been realised that they play a crucial role in the cultivation and management of diversity.³

Methodology

Methods have been used in this quantitative research. The researcher has studied various articles research paper and books related to this topic and accumulated information which has been used. This paper is the result of extensive literary research and various practices which have been performed by Indian women. Knowingly or unknowingly how they save and assemble the pieces or spices from forests or plants and create an unbreakable bond with nature.

Observation

Some observations and research are written here as follows:

Some Plants here which are associated with God & Goddess and reserved by Indian women on behalf of their rituals, beliefs and superstitions. They protect nature :

S. No.	Vernacular Name	Scientific Name	Family Name	Name of God & Goddess Residing in Plants
1.	Tulsi	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i> Lamiaceae Lord Vishnu	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i> Lamiaceae Lord Vishnu	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i> Lamiaceae Lord Vishnu
2.	Bel/ Belvika Patra	<i>Aegle marmelos</i>	<i>Corr</i>	Rutaceae Lord Shiva

3.	Ashoka	<i>Saraca asoca</i>	Fabaceae	Kama Deva or God of love
4.	Arjun	<i>Terminelia</i>	<i>arjuna</i>	Lord Brahma
5.	Kadamba	<i>Neolamarckia</i>	<i>cadamba</i> Rubiaceae	Goddess Durga
6.	Neem	<i>Azadiracta</i> Devi	<i>indica</i> Maliaceae	Goddess Durga & Neemari
7.	Peepal	<i>Ficus religiosa</i>	Moraceae	Lord brahma
8.	Kamal	<i>Nelumbi nucifera</i>	Nymphaceae	Goddess Sarswati

• **Various Movement organized by women to save Biodiversity/ Plant Diversity:**

S. No.	Organization	Name of the Movement	Place area	Related Plants
1.	Gaura devi Chipako Movement	1970	Chamoli, Uttra	Timber plants
2.	Suryamani Bhagat "Save the forests of"	Jharkhand movement"	Kotari village, Jharkhand	Sal forests
3.	Amrita Devi	Bishnoi movement	Khejarli village, Rajsthan	Khejari plants
4.	Vasantha Sena (Green force)	Vasantha movement" (1810) sena	" Villages near Periyar tiger reserve, Kerala	-
5.	Vasudha Chakrathi&Rathika Ramasamy	Indian wildlife Photographers	All India	-

Above are the lists of those plants which are used and worshipped by women. Moreover, Women utilize all the plants in their kitchen and for the health of their family. She knows excellently how to use plants as a herb. If sometimes a child falls sick, the mother will give his/ her various types of medicine/ natural herbs such as: Kadha and other types of treatments.

- **Below Researcher is going to attach a report/ list of various plant which is used in the treatment of women:**

S. No	Local Name	Scientific Name	Family Parts	Used	Uses
1.	Arand	<i>Ricinus communis L.</i>	Euforbiaceae	Leaves	Secretion of more milk
2.	Gudahal	Malvaceae	<i>Hibiscus rosasinensis</i>	flowers	White discharge
3.	Papeeta.	<i>Carica papaya L</i>	Caricaceae	Fruits	Clean uterus and abortion
4.	Bhang	<i>Cannabis sativa</i>	Cannabinaceae	Leaves,Fruits	Gonorrhea
5.	Gajar	<i>Daucas carota</i>	Apiaceae	Leaves	For abortion & Antifertility

Except above attached list, there are many plants and herbs that are used. Women are familiar with many herbs.

Now, there is another term for Eco-feminism that is connected with the environment and women. Moreover, not only in India outside of India, we see many examples, of movements and fights for the environment. Especially, when we see it in the context of women and how they observe everything from nature and utilize it. It shows a link between them.

Now we come to back on Vedas, Upanishads, *etc.* how they portray the relation between a woman and nature which is called prakriti. Patriarchy, in dealing with both women and nature, preaches gender imperialism with the exploitation of the environment and the othering of women in society. “Sherma identifies three aspects of Hinduism that fall into this category: (a) the identification of the feminine maternal with materiality; (b) the purity/impurity dichotomy; and (c) the devaluation of the feminine principle (my and prakriti) and the phenomenal world that it represents, by philosophies of transcendence.”⁴

“Prakriti, (Sanskrit: “nature,” “source”) in the Samkhya system (*darshan*) of Indian philosophy, material nature in its germinal state, eternal and beyond perception. When *prakriti* (female) comes into contact with the spirit, *purusha* (male), it starts on a process of evolution that leads through several stages to the creation of the existing material world. *Prakriti* is made up of three *gunas* (“qualities” of matter), which are the constituent cosmic factors that characterize all nature. In the Samkhya view, only *prakriti* is active, while the spirit is confined within it and only observes and experiences. Release (*moksha*) consists in the spirit’s extrication from *prakriti* by its own recognition of its total difference from it and noninvolvement in it. In early Indian philosophical texts the term *svabhava* (“own being”) was used in a sense similar to *prakriti* to mean material nature.”⁵

The patriarchal notion places men closer to culture and women closer to nature which give rise to power binaries such as men/women and nature/culture. This has enhanced the objectification of both women and nature. The paradigm shift from androcentric to ecocentric with feminists’ intervention into environmental contexts paves the way for a more sustainable development as stated in the World Survey Report of Women in Development 2014: Gender Equality and Sustainable Development (2014).⁶

Nature, the flowing river, the fruit-yielding trees, the harvest to be gathered. Among the South Indian tribals, Sita, the Queen of King Rama in the Ramayana, is not a human being. She is the wind in the grass, she is the flowing river, the fruit-yielding trees, the harvest to be gathered. She is Nature. Glimpses of their history remain in their songs and ballads. They were advanced in agriculture, though some groups were forest dwelling hunters (Devi, 2015, p.i).⁷

Many of the writers in India talked about Eco-Feminism and portrays in it their Writing. See the list below:

S. No.	Authors	Book on Eco-Feminism
1.	Vandana Shiva	Ecofeminism
2.	Sangita Patil	Ecofeminism and the Indian Novel

3.	Sarita Pandey	Ecofeminism and Indian Women Writing in English
4.	Bina Agarwal	Gender and Green Governance
5.	Nicole Anae	Cultural Studies and Ecofeminist

Conclusion

In the present scenario, India is affluent in biodiversity. Indian women have played an important role in conserving biodiversity. Aboriginal people and indigenous women keep the environment safe as he/ she can. The woman is a symbol of nature. In India, she is considered as a Goddess. Often Goddesses have a symbol of a plant or something that is related to biodiversity and conservation. On behalf of this research, it can be said women and nature are incomplete without each other. The woman is the guardian of nature.

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