
Role of Indian Women in Peace Building: Takeaways from Environmental Issues

Abstract

The present paper highlights the need of peace at different levels. Peace building at national as well as global level should involve local people from the community. Local issues should be addressed and resolved first and will be helpful in resolving global issues. Men and women both should have equal participation rights in expressing their views and providing solutions for different environmental issues. Women in the past have led the foundation stone of initiating and participating in different environmental movements. They have provided hope and opportunities for other women to raise their voice for their rights. Equal distribution and sharing of resources is basic human right, as we live on one Earth. Policy making and other governing bodies should involve women and give them decision making powers in taking best steps towards sustainable development. Environment education and awareness at both urban and rural setup is important. Involvement of women in local environmental issues will give them confidence and power to provide solutions for everyday challenges. Women while closely interacting with environment learns to live in harmony with nature. This attitude will make her stronger in representing their thoughts for global peace building.

Keywords- peace building, environmental issues, environmental movements, policy making, sustainable development

Introduction

Peace determines the quality of life. It is related to total development of a human being. A peace-oriented person is always able to stay focused and positive in every situation. If we sow seeds of peace, we will harvest its benefits. There is a famous saying of Mahatma Gandhi- “Each one has to find peace from within, and peace to be real must be unaffected by outside circumstances”.

Peace is at different levels- Individual level, Interpersonal level, Community level, National level and Global level. At every level peace is necessary for the survival of mankind. Peace building is a holistic approach, where people from local level, societal level and international level are considered important. In the words of Lederach- “the greatest resource for sustaining peace in the long term is always rooted in the local people and their culture”. He further argued- there is a need to recognize local people’s role in peace building at societal level, local people should be seen as a resource rather than recipients in peace building. There are many incidences worldwide where local people along with their cultural practices and local traditions came forward and acted as bridge between society and state.

Environmental issues and Peace building

Globally there are many issues where peace among nations was disturbed and there was war like situations. These issues are many a time for natural resources like water, minerals, land, forests etc. Environmental peace building includes non-violent sustainable communities. Peace starting from home, communities, between states and countries. Peace between developing countries and developed countries is a major issue of concern these days. Sustainable use of resources and its equitable distribution by different countries, emission of pollutants, toxics into the environment, rising global temperature, loss of biodiversity, are few issues which are affecting environment and creating tension among the nations. There are many countries which are members of many peace promoting organizations, whose agenda is to look after the injustice happening with any nation in terms of equal rights and opportunities and also equal access to natural resources and violation of basic human rights. There are many global faces which are constantly writing and fighting for better environment for all and sustainable use of resources. One of the very popular names in building environment peace was Rachel Carson, who raised her voice through her book titled 'Silent Spring in 1962', where she warned about the harmful effects of using pesticides such as DDT on different life forms on Earth. Her work was like a spark in this field and people in other parts of the world realized their rights and duties towards environment conservation. India being one of the oldest civilizations has always lived in harmony with nature. Celebrating nature and offering respect is embedded in its culture. Worshipping Lords in the faces of different heavenly bodies, celebration of different festivals both religious and harvesting are based on different seasons is basically a welcoming warm gesture towards Mother Nature. Till date these practices are being followed and passed on to new generations where they understand mountains, rivers, forests and other creatures through different stories narrated by their elders.

Role of women in Peace building

The United Nations Security Council on 31 October 2000 passed Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security, recognizing the role of women in peacemaking and peace building, as well as mandating their meaningful inclusion in male-dominated spaces where peace and security decisions are made.

As per UN Women, in peace processes between 1992 to 2019, women were only 13% of the negotiators, 6% mediators, and 6% of peace agreement signatories were women. Women in many parts of the world are still fighting for equal rights. They are experiencing gender biasness both at home and at work. They are seen as weaker section of the society which is dependent on men for every single decision of her life. How can she put her thoughts in nation's peace building? But despite of all this women from many nations have come forward after many struggles and participated in taking important decisions for their nations and have become voice and face of many others. There are many global leaders from the women community across the world that are constantly working hard to bring global peace and providing equal opportunities to others as well.

A report titled "Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes" published by the International Institute of Peace stated that- the likelihood of agreements being implemented for a

longer time period to establish durable and sustainable peace is much more when women are involved as compared to not involving them. Women represent almost half of the population in the world. Their voices really matters, because there are many issues which a women can understand better for other women. Policy making and its implementation should acquire women members so that there should not be any biased decision for rest others.

Indian women and their role in Environment peace building

Women participation in peace building in India is not new. From the time immemorial women leaders in freedom struggle left their mark in the history. Their contribution in peace building was at different levels. Be it a freedom movement or equal rights or peace building women have contributed equally everywhere. India being a developing nation has experienced different challenges in Environment conservation and peace building. Most of the population of India is settled in rural setup and are directly or indirectly dependent on natural resources for their livelihood. Among them women from different households are the ones whose interactions with these natural resources is more in terms of filing water for different needs, collecting fallen twigs and dead wood for cooking, collecting wild fruits and vegetables from the forests, fodder for animals and many more..

Many a times when men of the house are busy working outside these women plays an important role by looking after the agriculture and cattle rearing for their survival as well as for extra income for the family. Women are more concerned with the immediate, local micro levels of everyday life and hence feel the impact of a degraded environment more.

Women in India are largely visible in the movements against deforestation and in conserving water. Many examples from the past can prove their crucial role in building peace and harmony with environment. Many of them have become role models for others and are inspiring women across the world.

Some cases from Indian context

One of the earliest recorded encounters of women protecting their environment can be traced back to 1731 among the Bishnois, who lived in the scrub forests of Rajasthan, near Jodhpur. Amrita Devi from Khejaralli village embraced the khejri trees along with 363 other women of the same Bishnoi community. She lost her life while doing so, in order to protect the trees from felling down. Bishnoi community worship khejri tree as this tree brings prosperity to their lives by fulfilling all their needs. As a result the forest was spared due to the strong resistance of the villagers. Amrita Devi and her group of women Bishnois can be considered the first women environmentalists of the world. This movement started by Amrita Devi in 1731 provided the inspiration for Bachni Devi and Gauri Devi of Uttar Pradesh in the Chipko movement of the 1972.

Chipko movement

This movement can be considered as the modern Indian environmental movement again led by women in the year 1972. Large scale deforestation of the Terai region of Uttarakhand which lies in the lower Himalayan region was planned. This led to loss of top soil and frequent occurrence of landslides and floods in that area. The local women of that area who were dependent on the natural resources for their daily livelihood started facing issues in terms of fuel wood, fodder and water shortage as they need to ask permission from the commercial forest personals and need to walk a lot for collecting all this. Also, their sacred forest patches which they were worshipping from ages were also getting depleted. This all led to the birth of Chipko movement with Bachni Devi and Gauri Devi as leaders of the protest. The movement began in Chamoli district and spread throughout the Uttarakhand Himalayas by the end of the decade. Rural women came together to save their forests by hugging the trees when the contractors came to fell them. Here all the female villagers came forward in large numbers and voluntarily participated in this movement. Women are seen as more sensitive to forests because they have a more direct relationship with them in these hill areas. The Chipko women were joined by Sunderlal Bahuguna and Chandi Prasad Bhat who gave the movement a direction and publicity at the national level.

Appiko movement

Inspired from Chipko movement the Appiko movement of the 1980s, to save forests in the Uttara Kannada region of Karnataka took place. The Appiko movement saw a large number of rural women participating for the conservation and protection of forests. In 1950, Uttara Kannada district forest covered more than 81 per cent of its geographical area. With development, major industries like pulp and paper mill, a plywood factory and a chain of hydroelectric dams sprouted in the area. These industries overexploited the forest resources, and the dams submerged huge-forest and agricultural areas. By 1980 the forest had shrunk to about 25 per cent of the district's area. The Appiko Movement was a response to this crisis and tries to save the Western Ghats.

Silent Valley movement (1976)

This was again a very popular movement in the southern end of Western Ghats in Kerala. Here, government declared to construct a dam for hydroelectric power project in the Silent Valley forest. At that time Sugatha Kumari, a Malayalam poet and an environmentalist took a leading step against the construction of the dam. Here also, a large group of women participated and joined hands together. Later they managed to convince the government and policy makers and Silent Valley was declared as a National Park in 1984.

Origin of Deccan development society

This was again a woman driven movement in 1983 in the present day Telangana region. This group of women works in sustainable agriculture; Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) of India, where more than two million poor women joined together to adopt small-scale clean technologies, such as clean cook stoves and solar lanterns; Navadanya which means 'nine seeds' focuses on biodiversity and traditional seed banks. This society with the help of all women members providing

financial aids to many poor families and empowering many women of the region. Not only this with the knowledge of their traditions they are contributing a lot in providing food security, ecological agriculture, community green fund etc.

Similarly, SEWA in Gujarat trained million of women and imparted skills for water harvesting, how to build and channelized water system for sustainable use, education and awareness for conserving water. Also, to restore traditional ponds, baolis, watersheds, underground water tanks etc..

Vandana Shiva founded Navadanya in 1982 to encourage traditional farming practices. Navadanya is an organization promoting biodiversity conservation and organic farming. The organization has not only helped create markets for farmers, but also promoted quality organic food for consumers.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA)

The NBA is India's largest mass movement started in 1985 and protesting against the construction of huge dams on the Narmada River. The proposed Sardar Sarovar Dam and Narmada Sagar will displace more than 250,000 people, submerge over 25 villages and forests. While the anti- dam movement began by protests from small farmers and locals spread across Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, and got a momentum with the coming of Medha Patkar, a social activist. She followed non violent ways of protest and put questions in front of the authorities.

Role of modern day women activist in the field of Environment

In this modern era a lot more challenges and environment issues have come up. Issues like climate change, pollution, right to live in clean environment etc are biggest challenges and women from different areas are actively raising their voices for the betterment of environment.

Some popular names like- Sunita Narain, the Director General of Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), and publisher of Down to Earth. Maneka Gandhi an animal rights leader as well as an environmentalist. Vandana Shiva, a Delhi based environmentalist and eco feminist, well known for her strong efforts to protect forests, organize women's networks, and conserve local biodiversity.

Environment policies and women participation

Every country has their own environmental issues among the states, regions and communities. There are many global issues as well, but those issues can't be resolved unless we find solutions for our local issues. It is true for achieving sustainable development goals we need to think from the ground level at policy making, and involvement of every citizen is important in this. Role of both the genders for providing solutions to the environmental issues is very important as both the genders will think in a gender sensitive way. There is now available an Environment Gender Index (EGI) that ranks countries on how they are translating gender and environment mandates into national policy and planning. Out of 72 countries that were ranked on EGI, India is ranked 46. According to World Bank, 1991- 'women play an essential role in the management of natural resources, including soil, water, forests and energy...and often have a profound traditional and contemporary knowledge of the natural world around them'. While global environmental policies

and projects reflect this change, in India a lot more needs to be changed in this direction. Efforts to include women in environmental policy in more engaging ways need to be conceptualized in the Indian context, keeping in mind the diverse social stratification in our society.

Recommendations

Role of women as peacemakers is really important in today's time. Involvement of women at both local and global level decision making can provide real and permanent solutions for many of the issues.

- ☐ Involvement of women as planners, developers, policy making, advisors and management related issues.
- ☐ Expansion of environment education at all the levels of formal and informal education systems.
- ☐ More number of positions for women at forests services and other forestry related jobs.
- ☐ Participation of women leaders both from rural as well as urban centers in various environment conferences both at local and at global levels.

Conclusion

Globally, women have always played a significant role in building peace in the time of crises. They have always been an active member of the society and a conservationist. Many of them have become a role model for others by stepping up first into the environment movement and sacrificed their lives and good time of their lives for future generations. India has witnessed a lot of such strong minded women who initiated such movements and fought bravely against injustice. Every state and region of our country has some story in the past to tell, where efforts of women and their contribution in protecting the environment is seen. Be it conservation of water, forests, wildlife and other resources, women and their lives are directly linked with all these. They know very well how in our daily lives management and wise use of resources is important. But their role in taking major decisions and policy making is still far behind. Learning from the contributions in the past and in modern time role of women in decision making should be given importance and priority. This is the real contribution in developing peace around the world. Harmony with nature is the key to build actual peace between nations.

References

1. Bandyopadhyay, J. (1999) 'ChipkoMovement: Of Floated Myths and Flouted Realities', Economic and Political Weekly April 10.

2. Lederach, J.P. (1997). Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies. Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press.
 3. Leonardsson, H. Rudd, G. (2015). The 'local turn' in peacebuilding: a literature review of effective and emancipatory local peacebuilding, Third World Quarterly, 36:5, 825-839, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2015.1029905
 4. Mago, P. Gunwal, I. Role of women in environment conservation.
 5. Prasad, S. Women and Environmental Movements and Policies in India, paper—9 module 14.
 6. Shiva, V. (1991) Ecology And The Politics Of Survival, Sage publications, New Delhi.
 7. United Nations. An Agenda for Peace. 1992. http://www.unrol.org/files/A_47_277.pdf.
 8. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Governance for Peace: Securing the Social Contract. 2011. http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/crisis%20prevention/governance-for-peace_2011-12-15_web.pdf.pdf.
 9. World Bank. The State- and Peace building Fund: Addressing the Unique Challenges of Fragility and Conflict. Washington, DC: World Bank. 2011. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTLICUS/Resources/511777-1240930480694/OPCFC_fragility-brochure-final-150.pdf.
-

Ms. Preeti Vohra

PhD. Research scholar

University of Delhi

Nature Education Officer

Delhi Biodiversity Parks Programme

ocean.preeti@gmail.com

9868316546

Professor Manisha Wadhwa

Aditi Mahavidyalaya

University of Delhi

manishaw@aditi.du.ac.in

9818766667