

SUCCESS STORIES OF ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS: AN ECOLOGICAL FEMINIST RESPONSES TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The later half of the 20th century was a witness to a large number of environmental movements, mainly as a consequence to various development models that was analogous to ecological crisis. Man's encroachment into the environment has been characterized through technological advancement and urbanisation. This is juxtaposed to the state's appropriation of land rights and associated resources of communities dependent on the latter for survival. Rising Environmental movements are, then, seen in the context of deprivation of traditional rights and an attack on the livelihood of these communities. These movements were seen as an assertion of civil society to retrieve their rights over land and/or natural resource that had been the crumbled under 'development projects'. My study on environmental protests is based on the nature of mass mobilisation and gender inclusive participation that entitle to successful ecological movement. This paper includes success stories of major environmental movements, such as Chipko, Plachimada, and Green Belt movement, to exemplify local communities as torchbearers of environmental conservation. Furthermore, the paper examines the unparalleled role of women in ecological activism and decision making processes. The methodological considerations are based on theoretical perspectives and research studies carried on in this field by various scholars. In the conclusion it was found that, the region specific mass mobilisation, and local knowledge, experiences could positively articulate the interests and demands of people across religion, caste, culture and communities. It was further realised that mass participation of women brought about significant change in the nature and course of environmental protests by adding new strategies to ecological planning and sustainable development.

KEYWORDS: *Environmental Movement, Sustainable Development, Feminist Political Ecology, Local Knowledge*

GENDER AND ENVIRONMENT PERSPECTIVES: AN INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about the relationship between women, nature and development, a relationship where women's work, like nature, is often undervalued, in terms of acknowledging the interdependence of women and nature in preservation of the environment to foster sustainable growth. Studies (Shiva 1988, Agrawal 1992, Rocheleau 1996) assert that, women are prominent actors in domestic chores as well as contributors to environmental rehabilitation and conservation. Even at international regimes, the Millennium Development Goals¹ include two inter-related issues, gender equality and environmental sustainability, foregrounding women as major bio-diversity conserver. Involving women in protecting the environment have helped societies to develop a sense of responsibility among the common people, which is needed to

¹ The eight famous goals in the Millennium Summit of UN in 2001 were defined under the category of Millennium Development Goals. They composed of objectives as to reduction in poverty, unemployment, women empowerment, universal education, environmental sustainability, etc.

maintain a good balance between mankind and the earth's resources. This has been reflected in their conservation techniques with reference to agro-biodiversity, through the evolution of their own working system. Rural Indian women collect the dead branches which are cut by storm, to use for fuel wood rather than cutting the live trees, demonstrating a sensitive approach to the environment. Some other statistical data published by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)², shows a deep connection between women, nature and development. The data give a glimpse of how, same access to both male and female in agricultural inputs and resources leads to increasing farm income by 20-30 per cent. In Eastern Asian and Sub-Saharan areas, women constitute almost 50 per cent of agricultural labour, working almost 12 to 13 hours per week more than men. However, inequality is seen through men's livestock holdings that is twice that of women's, while their landholdings average three times those of women. These statistical figures, reflect on competency of women to ensure development, although, various models of development are pro-men and based on violence against nature. In this backdrop, the claim stands apparent that, women have a close connection with their local environment, and along with the children and marginalised sections, are often the prime victims of environmental degradation, with an unequal relationship in resource planning and management. (Bailey, S., Bryant, R. 1997)

The ecological departure of rural and tribal women, is clearly visible while explicating the contradicting relationship of men, women, and environment, designed around domination of men and patriarchal values. This is especially true in the context of developing nations, where women are particularly more involved in the subsistence activities (such as cooking, rearing child, agricultural labour, etc.), and thereby more seriously affected by environmental pollution. It is important, for these women, to have a larger access to resource use and management, and to have a better decision making in day to day activities. This is, however, denied to them as many societies are under strong patriarchal structure and discourage women to have a public life of interaction or access to their rights. Thus, the main point being that in the Third world, the women's activities related to 'livelihood' concerns have greater role in environmental preservation. This has to be enhanced by providing access to resource use and management at grass root level. A limited access to resource use and management, creates an epistemological gap in environmental planning with a little knowledge, available out of women's experiential base, to be utilised in the public policy domain. This systemic exclusion of women at three crucial levels of the decision making process, that is, resource use and management; local knowledge systems; and ecological activism lead to a 'gendered environmental politics.'³ An important consideration could then be, can women participation in ecological movements confront such politics while creating a platform for, or contributing to larger women's movement in India and other the developing countries?

If sustainable development is a goal of the global community, the role of women in achieving this has to be acknowledged and enhanced both at a theoretical level and with a pragmatic approach. In the later half of the 20th century, the most dominant discourse to influence the growing body of literature on Women, Environment and Development, is that of ecofeminism⁴, a broad canvas of ideas and practices, evolving largely from Western women's participation in the wom-

²IFAD is an international financial institution and a specialised United Nations agency dedicated to eradicating poverty and hunger in rural areas of developing countries.

³Environmental politics delineates, both the politics about the environment and a disciplinary study that is focused on three main components: "the study of political theories and ideas related to the environment; the examination of the environmental stances of both mainstream political groups and ecological movements; and the analysis of public policymaking and implementation affecting the environment, at local, national and international levels." For this paper, I will focus mainly on idea of environmental politics as developed in political (mainly feminist) theories, related to ecological movements. Saying that the environmental politics is 'gendered' in nature, means that, women are largely excluded from all the three main components as mentioned above.

⁴It must be noted that ecofeminism is itself a product of ecology + feminism, indication a combination of feminist and ecological movement.

en's, ecology and peace movements. It was argued that degradation of the environment is associated with oppression and violence against women and had a deeper impact on sustainable development, creating a new discipline of inquiry into the interconnection of women and nature. However, Western Ecofeminists are criticised for treating women as a 'universal' category without acknowledging the fragmentations within women based on caste, race, religion and region specific livelihood issues of the developing world. In this context, writings of Vandana Shiva (1986; 88) emphasise on the search for a new, spiritual relationship between society (culture) and nature where women are portrayed as 'natural' environmental carers, both because of their role in nurturing life, and their experiential knowledge gained from working closely with their environment. Nature-women affinity in the Third World, tends to inter-relate ecological concerns with larger socio-political concerns of the gendered power structure, as women share a huge responsibility of livelihood and sustainability in the society.

Another crucial phenomena of the period beginning from 1970's was discerned at the level of civil society in the form of new environmental social movements. Featuring from urban pollution (as in case to London Smog movement, American urban waste movement) to region specific livelihood issues (such as in Chipko, Appiko, in India to Brazilian Rubber Stamp movement) or displacement issues (such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan and Tehri Dam Movement in India), these ecological movements became protest sites for women around the world. A new vibrant environmental politics, both nationally and internationally, were visible at these sites, that fetched into a distinct political ecology perspective treating gender as a critical variable in resource use, management and environmental planning.

To have mentioned that gender dimension of environmental issues rests on two interlinked claims, firstly, women and men stand in a different relationship to their environment, and second, the environment is a gendered issue, that is, women are treated subordinate to men in ecological conservation, I am interested in arguing for non-gendered environment politics, from the perspective of feminist political ecology.

Feminist Political Ecology was first introduced in 1996 Routledge volume edited by Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter and Wangari, to develop a conceptual framework for examining human-environment issues. Focusing on the crucial aspect of gender in shaping socio-ecological change, they argued against 'gendered' nature of environmental politics due to the following factors: gendered access to resource use and management; gendered knowledge system; and gendered power relationship. These three themes, are important to investigate the exclusion of women in grass root ecological activism and public policy domain.

The first theme explains, the gendered access to resources (for e.g, generally only men entitled to resources) which leads to gender based asymmetries in women's exclusion to certain kind of property rights. For instance, due to rapidly changing farming system women are largely excluded from the initial agricultural process, ploughing and market work. In other words, with increasing specialisation, out migration, commercialisation, women are being solely employed in all agricultural work in rural areas yet the gender entitlement of resources is differentiated. The rights over resources and gendered responsibility of management of resources become an important concern here.

The second theme of gendered knowledge system, concerns with the views and perceptions of ordinary and local people that must be valued. Feminist's political ecologists argue that rural 'local knowledge' must be valued in comparison to the urban/modernist epistemology. The concept of 'ecological other,' that is, excluding unrecognised set of values, practices, understanding of a community to the in-standard or general understanding of environmental values and policies be-

comes prominent here.

Lastly, the third theme of gendered power structure is based on male domination and patriarchy that restricts women to a private domain of household, hindering their activities in the public domain, as they are unacquainted with proper rights, responsibilities and management. Engendering environmental politics would involve participation of women in public fora, in relation to ecological as well as socio-economic concerns. The recent surge in women's activism is attributed to their response to the changing local environment and shift towards the model of 'sustainable development' at global regimes. However, there has been not one, but "multiple and interconnected sites of struggle"⁵, where women have begun to redefine their identity and the associated meanings of gender through collective struggle and exercise of human agency both at private and public domain. There has been an indication of co-emergence of ecological and women's movement from this perspective. It would be worthwhile here, to discuss the three movements which display integrated (with themes) role of women to ensure successful environmental politics and gender response.

Women, Nature and Environmental Movements: Study of Chipko, Plachimada and Green Belt Movement

"The environment movement can only survive if it becomes a justice movement. As a pure environment movement, it will either die, or it will survive as a corporate greenwash." - Vandana Shiva

Though numerous movements over ecological concerns have taken place in India and worldwide, but I have taken up only three out of them. The first two movements are Chipko and Plachimada. These movements have raised fundamental questions regarding rights and access to natural resources. While Chipko raised the question of ownership and management of forest resource being linked to the livelihood of local people, particularly women; Plachimada became a torch-bearer for river protection/conservation, an issue that was enormously raised by women, highlighting the nefariousness of big corporate houses making profits over river pollution. The last movement discussed is Green Belt Movement of Kenya, a non-government organisation, that mobilises local rural women in their drive to plant trees, adopt local conservation practices and oppose any governmental action that disrupt the local ecology and gender-specific livelihood concerns. Understanding the role of these environment movements is important to explicate gender sensitive approach in environmental movements and civil society processes as a prerequisite for gender inclusive measures to foster sound and regionally appropriate environmental planning and sustainable development.

Chipko Movement: Epitome of Gender Inclusive Participation

The roots of the Chipko movement go back to several decades, originating in the Indian Himalayas (Garhwal), dedicated to saving trees by hugging them, upon the arrival of axemen (who came to fell off the trees to rebuild the area for commercial purposes). The term 'Chipko' loosely translated in Hindi for 'hug' and the word 'andolan' means movement. With Sunderlal Bahuguna, as a prominent leader, it was started on 30 May 1969 during the 'Ziladan' of Uttarakashi in the wake of Acharya Vinoba Bhave's Gram Swaraj Movement.

A reflection at the grassroots activism showed a new kind of environmental politics emerging with this movement. One of the important and interesting aspect of the movement was the involvement of women. Gaura Devi, an important

⁵Gillian Hart's (1991) analysis within Malaysian context in response to women's role in both ecological protection and sustainable livelihood at home, challenging patriarchy.

woman leader in the movement, had later recounted,

“It was not a question of planned organisation of the women for the movement, rather it happened spontaneously. Our men were out of the village so we had to come forward and protect the trees. We have no quarrel with anybody, but only wanted to make the people understand that our existence is tied with the forests.” (Drew, p.238)

It was for the first time, women involved in a way that was to an extent unusual in any ecological movement in India. Chipko is a reflection of women’s disposition to exercise their rights over resource use and management, as the depletion of forest resource had a deep impact on their livelihood, since they were the domestic protectors of the family. Combined with this, their local/traditional practices of resource conservation, and specific understanding of the environmental regeneration in the Himalayas, made them object the commercial developmental model enforced by the state. This was seen with their objection to dispose off and cut even the dead trees which could lead to soil erosion due to logging practices, while their own hearths would remain cold. Moreover, Chipko women believed that at specific locations only ‘particular trees’⁶ must be grown as they would look after the soil, fuel, water and fertiliser needs in a better way, in contrast to techno-scientific model of the state officials (Bhatt, 1990). In fact, demurring about the gendered access to resource management and knowledge system, has been a significant strategy for Chipko women to question the power dynamics in the society.

From many ecological protests, Chipko grew into a wider movement against gender inequalities with women taking up issues of alcoholism, domestic violence and demanding a greater share in decision making. Such incidents are suggestive of an accompanied women's movement within the ecological protest. (Shiva, V., & Bandyopadhyay, 1986) In fact, these protests were not only against felling of forests but to save their livelihoods and to prevent natural disaster by use of their holistic ecological understanding of forests. An important speculation was given by Bina Agarwal (1992) regarding the involvement of women in the movement by explaining how women's participation led not only in the success of ecological movement but also led to contestation of social structure and patriarchy at the later stage. Therefore, by challenging the gendered access to resource management and knowledge system at public domain, lead them to contest patriarchy in the private sphere. Such a level of participation affirms our theoretical framework of gendered environmental politics that reflects upon the greater role of women in grassroots activism as an important criteria for success of any ecological movement.

Plachimada Movement: Exemplify Gender Politics Against Water Pollution

Plachimada is a small hamlet and forms a part of Perumatty Panchayath of Chittur taluk in Palakkad district in the state of Kerala. The people in this area hail from a poor socio-economic background, with half of the population as migrants from rural Tamil Nadu who came here in search of labour and livelihood. The major livelihood of the people was agriculture and agro based labour forms. However, disenchanted with low productivity and returns, people were finding opportunities to shift to different professions. This was provided with India’s new economic policy of 1991 and its decision to liberalise the financial laws and business rules to attract foreign investments resulted in revival of Coca-Cola’s company that was restricted under FERA Act. The company officially applied to Perumatty Panchayath for permission to set up a

⁶This had been seen in their response to energy crises, when people improvise in many ways to collect their basic needs for energy resources, in cooking and other activities. In many communities, crop residues such as Arhar sticks and Cotton sticks are used as increasingly for fuel. Crop residues, unlike most trees and weeds, are private property in many communities, which are now appropriated by the state.

bottling Plant in Plachimada on 8 October 1999. It then began its operation in Kerala. However, in the words of local community,

“they came to our village with glittering offers; that our people would get many job opportunities in the plant; the overall development of our village would be taken care of; the economic growth of the area would be strengthened...”⁷

In an initial assessment of environmental impact caused by the Hindustan Coca Cola Beverages Private Limited (HCCBL) at Plachimada, it was found that none of these promises stand fulfilled (Wramner, 2004, p. 5). What drew thousands of people into protests was the cultural transformation with an adverse effect on ecology and the sustainable livelihood, with tribal women being the most vulnerable section. Firstly, due to the decline of agriculture, there was a steep fall in the employment opportunities in the region, which forced around one thousand people to leave the village in search of work. This led to an extra burden on women with domestic chorus already in the hands. The company provided about 400 employment opportunities out of which nearly 300 were casual labourers with only 30-50 local people (Jananethi report 2002). The outmigration had all the negative impacts of so called development induced displacement. Secondly, the food culture of the people underwent basic changes. This again had much impact on women as the paddy lands dried-up or contaminated, many stopped cultivating paddy and vegetables. Finally, it caused political apathy, a unique political culture characterised by the tendency to abstain from the political process. Overall, the extreme rising groundwater pollution and associated miseries, gradually involved more and more people in the Plachimada protests.

Looking at the protest strategy reveals a tremendous role of women in grassroots activism, reflecting on a novel environmental politics in South India. In this struggle too, we can find the participation of women mainly due to loss of traditional rights over natural resource that had a greater impact on them, with their role mainly attached to subsistence activities. The sit-in-demonstration against the company at Samara Pandal saw women from all spheres, young or old, along with their children. They were often arrested and held without charges by the police officers, yet this could not diminish their fight. Most of these were women from tribal communities, since they were the one are who were severely affected but the Company’s operation. This was so because, they were neither employed in the Company nor they had any access to clean water resources to carry their day to day activities. To quote Rugmini, a resident of Plachimada colony, “We have lived here for the last 20 years. Before two years, we need not have to go out to fetch water. However, today we walk a distance of two and a half kilometres to collect two pots of water.” (Pilla, 2008)

The first women to notice the changes in the quality of water and its impact on domestic life, was Kunchamma; a homemaker in Plachimada district (Pariyadath, 2006). She discussed the matter with her son, Veloor Swaminathan, who was the first one to mobilise villagers to make the issue of water contamination, a paramount importance. During his mobilisation, it was mostly tribal women, who were interested in public deliberation for an effective interest articulation (Pariyadath, 2006). Vilayodi Venugopal, another social activist who was closely associated with the movement, confirmed the immense participation of women, particularly tribal, and dalits, formulating unique protest strategies. (Ranjini&Prakashan, 2007)

In order to realise the effective role of women, Mayilamma, an illiterate woman from Eravalur tribe, rose up to mobilise other women to form Coca-Cola Virudha Samara Samiti (also known as the Anti Coca-Cola Struggle Committee)

⁷ As quoted in ,Wramner, E.(2004). ‘Fighting Coca colonization in Plachimada’.MKU:Spring Term.

in Plachimada. The committee held a continuous protest outside the Coca-Cola's factory gates, demanding its permanent closure. Their main reasons of protest were the demands related to reclaiming their rights to access of resources, safe and clean drinking water. Her movement was joined by many native people, both men and women, in order to protect their natural resources. Mayilamma inspired women to participate in struggle by stating that, 'When you drink Coke, you drink the blood of people.' A lot of coverage and importance was given to it by the ecofeminist leaders like MedhaPatkar and Vandana Shiva while, Mayilamma exclaimed the Speak Out award by Outlook magazine and the SthreeShakthi Award. She, later on, inspired many women to come at public spaces and reclaim their rights. Collective action at public domain gave them courage to speak up against other social issues affecting them at private domain, with Mayilamma setting a strong example, exclaiming human agency and sense of self. (Pariyadath, 2006)

The use of regional specific knowledge in water conservation and harvesting has been going on for decades in India. Infact, the usage of water by women and men cannot be taken as the same. For women of Plachimada, water has always been a common property, a fundamental right and a resource to be used by all equally, without being paid or exercised as a commodity. Such a view was attracted by international media and NGO's widely. In fact, the International Water Conference held in Plachimada in January 2004 reflected on this new face of Plachimada agitation wherein the event criticised the logic of water as a private property turning it into an anti-globalization struggle (Vasudevan, 2005). Any protest that excludes women as actors and as an interest group tends to ignore half of the population, thereby staking the efficacy and efficiency of the movement.

Therefore, like Chipko movement, in Plachimada too, we could find women activism as a main reason for the success of the environmental movement. As Feminist Political Ecologists claims, this women's activism has been necessary due to the challenge of gendered access to resource use and management and use of traditional local experiences of the women. This has been time and again reflected in the movement with greater participation of pregnant women, old age women and Adivasi women, who were mostly suffered from shortage as well as the contaminated water.

Green Belt Movement: Kenyan Experiment on Engendering Activism

In Africa too, as in many parts of the world, women are restricted to subsistence activities, responsible for meals, rearing children, domestic chorus and collecting firewood. Increasing deforestation not only implies desertification, but it also meant that women now have to struggle to collect firewood and have to travel much more than they used to earlier. Formed as a non-governmental organisation (NGO) in 1964 by WangariMaathai, a Professor, noble laureate and environmentalist, Green Belt Movement (GBM) of Kenya mainly focuses on environmental conservation, community development and capacity building. It promotes these objectives through a nationwide grassroots tree planting campaign, development of green belts and fuel woods plots for local people, particularly for women for self-sustenance and empowerment, to tackle the problem of soil erosion.

In collecting some astonishing facts, over 50 million of trees were planted since Wangari started the movement in 1977 (Maathai, 2004). This was complemented with training to over 30,000 women in forestry, food processing, bee-keeping, and other trades helped them in earning a sustainable income out of their lands and resources (Maathai, 2004). It mobilised women and gained success in planting thirty million trees over the period of thirty years. According to Maathai,

“GBM has given training to thousands of women in environmental conservation and management. As a result, some of the women have initiated group projects, for example revolving funds, while others have become independent leaders and decision-makers capable of addressing community related issues ”(Maathai, 2004a: 37).

Enormous courage was imparted to exercise an equal access to resource use and management by educating the one who joins GBM. It helped in creating a society that respects democracy, decency, adherence to the rule of law, human rights, etc. Women, later acted as leaders by taking roles of running nurseries, working with foresters, planning and implementation of community-based projects related to water harvesting and food security. Such roles develop more confidence in them and it gives them more power over the direction of their lives. In fact, it reiterated their role in conserving the traditional knowledge and practice with response to changing times. For example, the Forest Act of Kenya entrenches, a forest based farming system, also known as the Shamba System, wherein, communities are allowed to grow crops along with exotic tree species. It has ultimately resulted in the indigenous forests degradation, associated with the invasion of foreign species. In response to this, GBM pilots a Clean Development Mechanism (CDM)⁸ project. Under this, the individual farmers and groups plant a mixture of exotic and native species of trees on farms and public lands, while they only plant ‘native tree’⁹ species in forests. This illustration is a reflection of the idea that CDM is a combination of both traditional and modern knowledge system by using the exotic and native species at appropriate planting grounds.

The movement best exemplify how the advancement of women in public domain challenged the gendered power relationship in society. It was seen during one of the opposition against the government's project to construct a multi-million dollar high-rise complex in Uhuru Park of Nairobi city in 1989. Maathai opposed the decision very strongly by mobilising women all around the places. She was even ridiculed as ‘mad woman’ and a frustrated divorcee, having no credentials to oppose the state’s decision. The then president, Daniel Arap Moi, declared that it was “un-African and unimaginable for a woman to challenge or oppose men” (Davison, 1996:7). However, Maathai stood firm with her decision to oppose the capitalist intrusion and destruction of the environment and encouraged other women to follow the same. In the end, she won the battle both against states bureaucratic order and the patriarchal, male dominated society and became the torch-bearers to thousands of women who could lead successful environmental movements in the future.

The movement, thus, tried to build up gender as a pivotal framework to understand the crisis in the ecological movements and develops gender-specific environmental concerns as an important basis. While ecofeminism has been critiqued for homogenising women by not considering issues such as class, caste or race, among women, Maathai and the GBM as an ecofeminist activism make a departure from this homogenisation by identifying different categories of women and their resource needs. The theoretical emphasis on feminist political ecology is pertinent to understand the differences within women as a larger/universal category, to include region specific gender concerns.

Linking Theory and Action in Women’s Organisation

Some important linkages need to be addressed while understanding the nature of the ecological movement. These linkages are related to greater women's participation as key to the success of environmental movements since greater interactions, experience and proximity with environment make them well equip to become activists and utilise their local

⁸The experience highlights the need for governments’ policies and programmes to be aligned with specific requirements for carbon projects. CDM calls for projects to certify there will be no ‘leakage’.

⁹The latter species include: Prunus Africana, Olea African, Cordia Africana, Juniperus Procera, and Hagenia among others, depending on the ecological zones.

knowledge system in important decisions about environmental preservation. The greater role of women in environmental movements has been important for them to develop their own environmental politics, un-gendered and sustainable in nature.

Activism for women, as reflected in the above movements, most often comes in connection with their social roles, particularly in defence of family and community, and most often for the reasons of livelihood security, health and safety and a sense of place. It can be seen that, women are front liners, unarmed and confident, which is used as a tactic to ensure a peaceful outcome in a tense situation. This was especially in the case of Kenyan women or Chipko rebellions, where women were not only in front line confrontations with police, but were also central to the organisations and follow-up negotiations. Time and again, the communities have retrieved to their indigenous knowledge production and experiences, making a complete departure from the scientific ecological planning of the West. This has been reflected not only in their unification role (say hugging the tree), but also in creating authentic mythology and songs, in linking nature and purpose of the conflict with the life of the community. Therefore, the first two themes of feminist political ecology, that is, gendered access to resource use and knowledge system has been successfully addressed in the movements. However, to realise an engendered environmental politics, introspection has to be made within the private domain, so as to acknowledge the contestation of patriarchy and gendered power relationship. Although, women activists have made affirmation to the claim of patriarchal resistance, many ground studies queers to a mixed response for a little change at home. In one of such study of Chipko movement, Gayatri Devi said, "I was told that ours was a very big andolan [movement]. Maybe it was, but we never got anything out of it. The road to our village is yet to be constructed and water is still a problem. Our children cannot study beyond high school unless they can afford to go and stay in a town. The girls simply cannot do that. In fact, many more studies are needed to affirm such claims, from different dimensions and conflict, specific to particular locations"(Mitra, 1993:51). In fact, many more studies are needed to affirm such claims, from different dimensions and conflict, specific to particular locations.

Still, it cannot be denied that an active involvement of women in environmental movements can set grounds to accentuate a strong women's movement, as Rocheleau (1996:5) notes, the recent surge in women's involvement in collective struggles over natural resource and environmental issues is contributing to a "redefinition of their identities, the meaning of gender, and the nature of environmental problems." Women in many other environmental movement, such as Narmada BachaoAndolan, Save Ganga Movement inGarhwal region have been upfront and gradually changing perceptions about what shall be their appropriate role, as they begin to translate their defence of the natural resource use into new livelihood strategies. In fact, few women who reach to a higher level, promote their stand and encourage others to come forward, speak, debate and negotiate at public space among others. Indeed, the environment is becoming an entry point for some women into politics in India and women's organisations are serving as points of departure for environmental action and political and social involvement.

Today, women all over the world and the grassroots organisations in which they are involved are more concerned than ever about the fate of their environment and the linkages among the declining ecosystems, degraded resources and their increasing poverty. Feminist Political Ecology offers a new perspective on the structures and processes of social change. Through its recognition of threats to equity and diversity and its promotion of social and environmental justice, it helps to strengthen the balance between men's and women's rights and responsibilities in local communities. It clarifies

linkages among gender, environment, livelihood and poverty in ways that benefit both women and men. In doing so, it addresses the economic and political barriers to environmental sustainability and social justice.

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