UNIT 3  GENDER AND ENVIRONMENT

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Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- delineate the approach gender and environment from the perspective of anthropology;
- explain major theories and approaches how gender is conceptualized in the knowledge system of society and environment;
- describe the diversification of gender roles globally in relationship with the environment; and
- comprehend the relationship of society, gender and environment.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Vital contribution of women to the management of biological resources, and to economic production generally, has been misunderstood, ignored, or underestimated. The importance of biodiversity to individuals varies according to gender. Based upon the social roles between men and women, gender is shaped by culture, social relations, and natural environments. For this reason, we need to incorporate gender dimensions into our understanding of biodiversity and its conservation, sustainable use and the sharing of benefits. Gender has long been recognised as important within environmental issues, but exactly how and in what contexts it is relevant has been hotly debated. In this unit we are going to have a basic overview of
dynamic interrelationship of gender, society, culture and environment. In this unit introduce the basic concepts and fundamental issues in environmental and gender studies which are needed to understand current debates on gender and environment. Unit also acquaint learners with different frameworks used in gender and environmental studies;

3.3 GENDER AND ENVIRONMENT CONCEPT

3.2.1 Defining Gender

Gender is equated with the women or women’s studies in most popular perception of what constitutes gender studies. However, gender is social interpretation and construction of biological difference among humans. Gender is a much wider concept than women and involves a holistic perspective on society and culture that inform and constrain the relationships of women with men and every aspect of human life can be viewed with a gendered lens. But in reality most studies based on gender take up a critical stand prioritizing women as it was realized that women have occupied a marginal position in society both in social terms and intellectually.

3.2.2 Development of Gender Roles

In the world view of the scientific Renaissance period in Europe, women were equated with the nature and men with the culture that means women could be dominated as men could dominate nature. Enlightenment thought, which was a crucial intellectual foundation for industrialisation, believed that it was both possible and desirable not only to distance society from nature, but to use this distance to control nature

3.2.3 Society, Gender and Environment

Natural resources are integral part of rural household. Women, particularly those living in rural area, play a major role of managing natural resources which include soil, water, forests and sources of energy. Their task in agriculture and animal husbandry, as well as their central role in the household make them daily managers of living environment.

As the women work ahead in the environment, they are the one who suffer more from the adverse effect of environmental degradation.

Yet, women are no longer viewed as mere victims, it is increasingly recognized that women can play important role in natural resource management as they have the knowledge and experience gained from working closely with their environment. In order to have a sustainable development approach on environment study, we need to incorporate the knowledge system of women in the mainstream understanding.

3.3 MAJOR THEORIES AND APPROACHES IN GENDER AND ENVIRONMENT

The gender environment relations have significant symbolic and material dimensions and significant implications for ecological relations. The questions that arise are; how environmental resources and responsibilities are managed and distributed? What role gendered power dynamics play in the day to day lives of people around the world? To answer these questions we need to understand the gendered environment; how we signify, symbolize, materialize, transform it. Secondly how gender informs power in distribution, access, and governance of natural resources.
There are various theories and approaches to study the interrelationship of gender and environment. This will include brief discussion on ecofeminism; gender, environment and sustainable development and concluded with anthropological approach to study the gender and environment.

3.3.1 Ecofeminism and Environment

Eco-feminism was coined as a term in 1974 when Frenchwoman Françoise d’Eubonne called for an ecological revolution to be led by women in order to save planet Earth. Eco-feminism has evolved both as an analysis of society-nature relations and as a prescription for how these relations can be transformed. There are many different perspectives of ecofeminism approaches. From the box 14.1, we can have glimpse of diverse world-wide different perspective of ecofeminism.

Broadly, these analyses fall within two areas: cultural eco-feminism and social eco-feminism. Cultural ecofeminism identifies a powerful and positive link between women and nature, particularly through such female reproductive functions as childbirth and menstruation. This connection between women and nature is used to argue that women are better placed than men as advocates of nature. Social eco-feminism argues that because women and nature have both been subjugated by a society dominated by men, women, through the roles they play, are in a better position than men to speak for nature, because of this shared experience of domination. Social eco-feminists contest that there is anything more natural in a woman’s body than in a man’s and disagree with cultural eco-feminists’ belief that there is something which constitutes a woman’s ‘essence’.

However, if we look for combined perspective of both cultural ecofeminism and social feminism then we do not find many differences. In fact they both carry us on the same direction. This will leads us to the affirmation that all women have a special relationship with nature. The “woman” is considered as a unitary concept and reality, centred on the role of women as mothers and nurturers of life. Again, it is maintained that the experiences of women, be they biological, as determined by the female body and its functions (pregnancy, childbirth, lactation, menstruation), or cultural (the care and bringing up of children), give them a different “natural mind-set”. In turn, the closeness of women to nature supposedly gives them a “special” knowledge that will enable them to save the planet (Shiva, 1989), and their “natural” propensity to protect the environment is an extension of their role as carers in the family group and the community.

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**Box 3.1**

Eco-feminism as a broad, diverse, world-wide movement Unique eco-feminist approaches

- Liberal eco-feminists who seek reform from within existing political and economic structures.
- Radical eco-feminists who wish to dismantle those very structures through direct action.
- Cultural eco-feminists who focus on the cultural manifestations of the women-nature connection, earth-based spirituality, goddess religions, and witchcraft.
- Social eco-feminists who build on the social ecology movement of the American anarchist philosopher Murray Bookchin in an attempt to restructure hierarchical society into egalitarian, decentralized, bioregional communities.
Socialist eco-feminists who draw on neo-Marxist philosophies to focus on the relationship between production and reproduction and on women’s work in the continued biological and social reproduction of life on Earth.

Ecological eco-feminists who strive to show the respects in which eco-feminism and the science of ecology (specifically eco-system ecology) share vital similarities.

Deep ecological eco-feminists who draw on the work of the Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess, and strive to dismantle both anthropocentrism (human-centeredness) and androcentrism (male-centeredness).

Critical or transformative eco-feminists who wish to transform the very categories of masculine and feminine and the divisive nature of dualistic rationality.

Aboriginal or native eco-feminists who live close to nature, nurturing sacred lands and reconsecrating degraded spaces.

Eco-feminists of the Third World who criticize mal-development in the First World and show us how women of colour may be in a privileged position because their minds are not yet colonized and because they do not profit from the oppression of others.


3.3.2 Gender, Environment and Sustainable Development

The movement known as “women and the environment” forms part of the strand of thought and action called “women in development”. In literature, this position is found to be greatly influenced by ecofeminism; particularly in the way it is based on the assumption that women have a special affinity with nature. This approaches followed by most of the NGOs (Non-government Organizations) with the diverse objectives that involves use and management of environmental resources; the power relationships that exist; and above all the gender relationships that differentiate men and women in the processes of production and reproduction.

The “women and the environment” approach stresses the potential of women’s role as “day-to-day administrators” of natural resources (Dankelman and Davidson, 1989), with analysis being carried out mainly at the micro-social level. It is maintained that women are the most affected by the energy crisis; therefore they should be considered as being the best placed to tackle and resolve this crisis. So in this approach, the focus is on the special characteristics of women as “custodians of the environment”. While at the same time they are regarded as the “most valuable resource, and the most neglected one”.

As of now, most of the development policies ignore two gendered realities:

i) The poor women in developing countries are heavily exploited and overworked. This creates the negative impact on their health, the amount of time available to them and their powers of self-determination and ability to express them full.

ii) The subordinate position that women occupy in our society, because of the system of power that regulates gender relationships. In other words the obstacles that they face in seeking to participate actively in decision-making processes that relate to the handling and management of environmental resources.

This approach enables us to identify the differences that exist between women by emphasizing the social, historical and cultural nature of the processes of
subordination and negotiation in which they are involved. The relationship of women to men, the division of labour, and decision-making patterns that obtain within their households, all of which to a large degree determine the way in which access to and use, ownership and control of resources are managed. The role of women is a key factor in the processes that are recognized as being agents of intermediary in the relationship between sustainable development and the environment. This includes population growth, migration, family organization of labour, patterns of production and consumption and unequal distribution of economic, political and technological power. Seen from this viewpoint, women and their participation are characterized not only by their status as “victims” of environmental changes. But it is also include their understanding, use and consumption of natural resources. In this regard their experience and creativity that they bring to community work, which enable them to suggest mechanisms to achieve sustainability.

Among the researchers who subscribe to this viewpoint, the main areas of interest and study are as follows:

1) The way in which male-female interaction affects and is affected by environmental change.

2) The structure of gender identities in different groups of women and men, in terms of the roles, subjectivities and socially constructed and culturally validated perceptions.

3) The ideology that sustains and defines the subordinate position of women as against men and the obstacles that women face in obtaining access to and control of environmental resources, and in exercising power in decision-making processes dealing with the direction of sustainable development.

It is accepted that the globalization of economies brings changes in the employment structure of countries. This in turn influences the way work is divided by gender; the way employment is generated and the way natural resources are used and managed. For example, international tariff and trade policies have a large impact on regional agriculture, and thence on the structure of agricultural employment and labour, as well as on the gender relationships that arise in this area of production.

3.3.3 Anthropological Approach of Gender and Environment

Quite early in the study of band societies by anthropologists it had been clarified that at the earliest phase of human adaptation it were the women who were responsible for basic subsistence of the bands, rather than the men. The food gathering activities of women provided that bulk of subsistence food and men’s hunting activity provided only supplementary proteins. Thus women’s relationship to the environment is life giving rather than life taking.

But anthropologists have related women’s activities not to their natural affinity to nature but to culture. Thus both women’s activities and their knowledge is specific to some women in some communities and also in some time periods. Thus some women especially of upper classes may engage in activities that are exploitative of nature. The wearing of animal fur as fashion is a case in point. But among most communities who are in the pre-industrial or peasant mode of existence women’s role as reproducers and producers of subsistence goods does keep them in close touch with nature.

**Activity:** Try to collect and understand basic approaches on gender and environment section. You can take help of the reading list given at the end of this unit.
3.4 GENDER, WATER AND ENVIRONMENT

In 2000, at the United Nations Millennium Summit, world leaders committed to a collaborative program of sustainable development, greater gender equality and increased access to health and education through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Greater access for people to water and sanitation is key to achieving each of the eight goals, but of especial interest to this essay are:

- Promote gender equality and empower women; and
- Ensure environmental sustainability, with a specific target to halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to water and sanitation.

The Principle has overwhelmingly been interpreted as calling for the increased participation of women in the planning and implementation of water projects. In the following lines we are going to discuss the key areas which need to be considered while analysing the gender and water relationships. This includes water for domestic purposes (it includes basic household consumption, health, and kitchen garden); for irrigation, and sanitation. We will discuss all these aspects with ideas of access and participation of particular gender perspective.

3.4.1 Gender and Water for Domestic Use

a) Access

The water is needed for the basic living of human being. ‘Access’ to the minimum quantity of water necessary for domestic use, usually meaning drinking, cooking, washing utensils and basic hygiene, can be defined in many ways. The UNICEF/WHO Joint Monitoring Program (JMP), the main source of national level data on access, defines ‘reasonable access’ as 20 litres per person per day from an improved source, no more than 1 km distant from the dwelling. ‘Improved’ sources are household taps, public standpipes, boreholes, protected dug wells, protected springs and collected rainwater. ‘Unimproved’ sources according to the JMP are unprotected wells, unprotected springs, rivers or ponds, vendor-provided water and bottled water. These data should be used with caution, because there are major disparities in data collection accuracy across regions.

Current JMP estimates are that 85% of the population has access in Latin America and the Caribbean, 81% in Asia and 62% in Africa (Table 14.1). Globally, approximately 65% of the population without access to safe water lives in Asia and 28% in Africa. Though these access numbers do not directly translate to those of access for women, they are reasonable proxies because it is almost always women and children who are responsible for the daily provision of domestic water.

Table 14.1: Access to drinking water by region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Area within region</th>
<th>% of population with access</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latin America &amp; Caribbean</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>62</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NGOs working in rural India report that women in many villages find themselves walking 2 km or more to their daily drinking water source. Case studies from South Asia as well as Africa suggest that women place high values on the opportunity cost of the time spent in collecting water; and when access to water improves, more time can be devoted to income-generating activities such as agriculture and micro-enterprises. Researchers argue that easier access to water is desirable not just for economic reasons but for overall quality of life, regardless of how the extra time is spent.

In urban and semi-urban areas in the developing world, women and children would not have to walk long distances, but waiting in line takes time. In densely populated slums such as India waiting times at water kiosks of 1-2 hours have been reported. Same as in rural areas, most of the fetching and waiting in urban areas is the responsibility of women and girl children. The 2006 Human Development Report concludes that there is a “straight trade-off between time spent in school and time spent collecting water”, and that this is much less true for boys than it is for girls. The lack of reliable access to water and sanitation could therefore be a major contributor to continuing gender inequality in education and the opportunities that education can provide.

b) **Health**

Even households with access to an ‘improved’ source might not actually be getting water that is safe to drink. Sources of surface as well as ground water are increasingly contaminated from human and animal waste, agricultural run-off, chemicals such as fluorine or arsenic, and industrial effluents.

Women and (usually) girl children fetch water in pots, buckets or ideally more modern narrow-necked containers, which are carried on the head or on the hips. A family of five would need 100 litres of water a day to meet its minimum needs; the weight of that water is 100 kg (220 pounds). In these circumstances, women and children may need to walk to the water source two or three times daily, with the first of these trips taking place before dawn. Globally, more than 50% of poor women suffer from malnutrition and iron deficiency. In rural India and Africa, especially during the dry season, 30% or more of a woman’s daily energy intake is spent just in fetching water. Carrying heavy loads over long periods of time causes cumulative damage to the spine, the neck muscles and the lower back, thus leading to the early ageing of the vertebral column. The burden of daily carrying is rarely covered in leading public health and epidemiological journals, as it falls outside of the conventional categories of “water-borne, water-washed and water-related diseases”.

c) **Women, water and kitchen garden**

Women are using water for other purposes such as irrigating vegetables in the farm and kitchen garden. They are prime factor for seasonal and off-seasonal vegetable farming near their households with the optimum utilization of waste water in the kitchen. A group of women can come together, identify a commonplace or land and grow desired vegetables, fruits, cereals etc. The proceeds of these set up can benefit the women and community as a whole. In this role the women are important from starting t of the product to selling of product.

d) **Gender, water and participation**

Many researchers and practitioners have emphasized women’s participation in local and community level in water management. The failure of many community-based water resource management projects has been attributed to the exclusion of women and their traditional knowledge.
3.4.2 Gender and Water for Irrigation

a) Access

The literature on small-farm irrigation brings up three gender-specific concerns. First, it suggests that women are often denied direct (that is, not mediated by male relatives) access to irrigation water. Second, new participatory irrigation management policies may not improve women's access to water unless the policies take account of gender-specific roles in agriculture. Unlike drinking water, which is accepted as being in the women's domain, women and men in a community or even household may need and use irrigation water in different ways. Third, the transformation in agriculture that irrigation brings about increases women's well-being through increase in household income, but could also increase in women's workloads without control over the additional income.

These illustrate the structural and household-level constraints to women's access to irrigation, as well as the multiple ways in which access can be mediated. The most common constraint identified is that women typically lack formal or enforceable rights to irrigation water. In a pioneering earlier study of land rights in India, Agarwal (1992) showed that women were denied access to a range of social and economic opportunities because these were available primarily to formal (mostly male) holders of land. Several field-based studies in Anthropology as well as Economics have confirmed that women are efficient irrigators as well and productive farmers. However in most canal irrigation systems water is allocated to the official landowner, usually male. Well ownership is also often a function of land ownership; thus, land ownership patterns directly preclude many women from water rights.

b) Gender, irrigation and participation

It would be naïve to assume, of course, that a changed property rights regime will automatically ensure access and opportunity for hitherto deprived women. Field studies confirm that women without formal rights attempt to get water through social networks or through access to paid labour, or through helpful or influential men.

The decentralized management, devolution of rights and responsibilities to Water Users' Associations in the public irrigation sector has taken hold throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America. This devolution is known as Participatory Irrigation Management (PIM) or Irrigation Management Transfer (IMT). So far, our discussion has suggested that women's participation at all levels is widely considered necessary for productivity, equity and sustainability. However, that women should play prominent (if not equal) roles with men in irrigation management is basic criteria for the PIM success. This is particularly possible if the terms of trade within households are biased against women.

3.4.3 Gender and Water Sanitation

Women are most affected by lack of sanitation and safe water. Apart from fetching water from far away, they also bear the burden of poor health and the security risks that arise when they are forced to go out at night to defecate in private. The design and siting of water supply and sanitation (WSS) facilities will better reflect the needs of both women and men. The technology adopted is likely to better reflect women's needs. For example, pour-flush toilets may not be preferred because they require considerably more work for women in transporting water. Successfully including men and women in WSS project activities requires gender analysis of the project area. Such an analysis will include an understanding of:

- Socio-economic and cultural context of the project area
The different priorities, demands and needs of men and women

Activity: Try to talk to female counterpart in your family about their perception about water and environment.

### 3.5 GENDER AND FOREST

For most of the women, especially in rural or semi urban sector, relationship with the forest and their product is very crucial. It is very imperative not only as a source of livelihood of their family but also have other association that are not directly related to livelihood. For instance belief system of the local community that is highly intermingled with the adjacent forest area, like sacred groves, sacred geography. As a result of the gender division of work, it is primarily women who are the major gatherers of a wide range of Non Timber Forest Products (NTFP) for subsistence and as a source of income. The women play important role in forestry in essentially three areas:

a) Gathering fuel-wood, fodder

b) Employment and income

c) Protection and management.

a) **Gathering fuel-wood, fodder**

Gathering of fuel-wood, fodder and NTFPs is an important subsistence and economic activity for poor women. It has been observed that the relative status of women within the family is higher in well-forested villages/ villages close to natural forests, because their contribution to subsistence and cash incomes of households is greater. Moreover, as their ownership of private resources is negligible, women, particularly those who are poor, depend heavily on common resources for meeting their survival needs.

b) **Employment and income**

The main forest-based activities from which people derive employment and income are:

- Sale of firewood and fodder
- Rearing of livestock (grazing in and/or collecting fodder from forests)
- Collection and processing of NTFP
- Forest-based handicrafts and cottage industries
- Wage labour.

i) **Direct Employment**

The forestry staffs prefer women for forestry operations such as nursery work, transplanting and tendu leaf collection. The work is contracted either on a daily-wage or piece-rate basis, but women often get lower wages than men for similar work are not paid regularly and harassed if they complain.

ii) **Self-Employment**

Self-employment in forestry refers to individual or family units geared towards deriving income from activities such as the sale of firewood, livestock rearing (Where income is derived from the sale of milk) and collection, processing and marketing. As per one study in India about 10 percent of the families derive on an
average 15 percent of their total cash income from NTFP sales, the main collectors being women.

iii) Secondary Employment

Although women’s participation rate in some large enterprises such as the match industry may be very high but is less than half in small-scale enterprises.

c) Protection and management and of forests

A study commissioned by UNDP and UNESCO with special reference to non-timber forest products (NTFPs) recommended Gender focus in forest policy, forestry schemes and Government programmes.

Deterioration of forest due to developmental activity has observable impacts on the lives of women. The women have played an important role during the Chipko Movement in the protection of trees from commercial exploitation, because they knew the importance of forests in their lives.

3.6 GENDER AND BIO-ENERGY

Energy is a means of satisfying needs. Both women and men rely on energy for most of their daily activities but they have different needs and roles and the various energy services have different impacts on men and women. In rural region women are responsible both for securing energy for the household and producing crops. Women from rural India rely heavily on traditional biomass systems to obtain the essential energy for their households. It has been observer that in India approximately 625 million people cook with biomass (IUCN).

In the past, women’s energy needs and lifestyles have been ignored, and both traditional fuels and modern energy services have certain limitations that can increase women’s problems. Simply abolishing traditional fuels is not a solution because the lack of energy can damage women’s health, and limit their ability to care for their families, get an education, earn income, and engage in social and political affairs.

The use of bio fuels can solve women's energy needs as long as consideration is taken of women's basic needs. More efficient appliances and cleaner, alternative forms of energy are needed to combat indoor air pollution. This includes the traditional system of energy such as wood energy, dung-cakes, and modern technology of harnessing energy like biogas, solar cooker, etc. Lowering women's workload, might affect or improve their health, and reduce or increase household income. For example, producing biodiesel from Jatropha could potentially lead to landscape restoration as Jatropha can grow in desert-like conditions.

Recommendations

- A gender perspective must be incorporated into planning and policy-making related to biofuels, to ensure that the concerns and needs of both men and women are taken into account.
- Women should have access to credit and information, to enable them to learn and decide which modern biomass resources and technologies can fulfil their needs.
- Governments should use disaggregated data to identify and quantify the different energy needs of women and men. On this basis, order should be given to design and implement appropriate policies and programmes, and to evaluate the results. Government officials should be trained in bringing a gender perspective into their work.
Most poor women in developing countries cannot afford to pay for energy services. Poor households spend about 15-28% of their income on energy while 2 billion people do not have access to electricity. Empowering women to provide their own energy is a key policy for sustainable development.

Women should have access to training programmes relating to the energy service sector. They will then be able to participate in decision-making, scientific development, technical implementation and practical use of biofuels or any other alternative energy source.

3.7 GENDER AND LAND RESOURCE

As land is a material resource and for this there is intense struggle between two half of the community namely men and women. However, these struggles over land are experienced differently by women and men, depending upon the complex interactions of gender, class, age, marital status and life-cycle positioning.

Feminist critiques of development have identified the marginalization of women from the means of production as a critical factor in the subordination of women. (Boserup, 1970)

a) Access

Land is also an important symbolic resource. A focus on women’s and men’s struggles over land must also consider the symbolic and discursive contestations that constitute those struggles.

As a symbolic resource, land holds important meaning within local culture of India. Access may be limited by the owner or controller of land and environmental resources. This is critical because these resources constitute an essential validation of social and political autonomy. For women, it is a means of moving from reproductive roles to production (Mies, 2003). Women are under-represented in institutions that deal with land and environmental resources, their rights under communal ownerships and ranches are not defined and this allows men to dispose of family land freely. Few women have land registered in their names.

b) Participation through land right

Women’s access to, and use of, natural resources is likely to differ from that of men’s, as a result of the gender and division of labour. The impact of natural resource development projects and environmental degradation on women and men will also differ. Women often have customary access to agricultural land for food and cash crop production, and to forests for foraging and fuel collection. However, women rarely have legal tenure. So, it became imperative criteria for the gender participation to secure land rights of women.

c) Access to and control over resources

In many countries, rights are linked to women’s marital status; widowed or divorced women often lose those rights. Even in countries where the law guarantees women and men equal access to land, women may not be aware of their rights, or customs may exclude women from de facto ownership. In, Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Zimbabwe, for example, women have the legal right to own land and trees but, in practice, men control nearly all of the property.

Such insecure land tenure influences use of natural resources by different groups. Women, the poor, and other marginalized groups are less likely to invest time and resources or adopt environmentally sustainable farming practices on land they do not own. In the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, researchers found that
men usually plant permanent tree crops, such as coffee, on household land where they have secure tenure. Women’s food crops are relegated to rented, steeply sloped land with eroding soils. Because tenure is not secure, women have little incentive to invest in soil conservation measures.

These restrictions on women’s land rights hinder their ability to access other resources and information. Unable to use land as collateral to obtain loans, women have difficulty in adopting new technology and hiring labour when needed. In addition, women may not be able to access other support services, such as extension and training programmes. Agricultural extension agents have traditionally focused on the male farmers, even where men are working off the farm and women are the primary cultivators (Population Reference Bureau, 2002).

3.8 WOMEN AND ECOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS

Worldwide, women have manifested themselves as agents of change for environment and sustainable development. In the following lines we are going to discuss about some theoretical reflections on the social movement of women for environment.

i) Beginning

The first documented expression of a woman, who gave her life for safeguarding the environment, goes back more than three hundred years ago, and that is from India. The direct concern of Indian women with environment protection can be traced long back to 1731 A.D. It was Amrita Bai of Khejaralli village, of Bishnoi community, of Jodhpur District of Rajasthan sacrificed her life for saving the trees of her village. She is the founder of the modern ‘Chipko Movement’. In order to save the trees, she embraced the trees and was cut as per the orders of the then Maharaja. Her three daughters and later her husband came forward and one by one, 363 people were killed and the trees remained untouched because of villager’s strong resistance.

ii) Chipko Movement

The Chipko movement is particularly known because of its actions to resist the destruction of their lands and livelihoods since 1974. In that year, the government of Uttar Pradesh (now: Uttarakhand region) in the Himalayan foothills diverted the men of Reni village to a fictional compensation payment site. At the same time labourers disembarked from trucks to start logging activities near the village. Under the leadership of Gaura Devi, (a 50-year old illiterate woman) women rushed from their homes to hug the trees (‘Chipko’ means hugging) and prevent them from being cut. A four-day standoff ended in victory for the villagers. The actions of the women of Reni were repeated in several other places in the region, as hill women demonstrated their power as non-violent activists. Then question comes why women imitated this kind of resistance for the forest? The threat of deforestation was enough to rally the local women to civil disobedience to protect the eco-system. They knew very well that their well-being, their prosperity, their lives, all were associated with the forest. Some commentators have described Chipko movement as ‘Women’s Movement’ (Bahuguna 1975

iii) Women movement against industrial pollution in Japan

In Japan, in the 1950s, the Nakabaru Women’s Society and Sanroku Women’s Society protested loudly against pollution from industries and power plants in the Tobata region. Women started to raise their voices in opposition and organized an increasingly powerful movement. From the authorities and companies, the women claimed the right to live in a safe and healthy environment. This resulted in major pollution prevention measures taken by the local government and corporations.
It is important to recall the names of Indian women who have fought legal battles in the court of law for environment protection, as Mrs. Sarla Tripathi of Indore, Kinkari Devi of Sirmour District, Krishna Devi of Rajasthan etc. Today the torchbearers are Maneka Gandhi, an environmentalist & politician, Medha Patekar, a social worker & environmentalist who are carrying on the crusade of environment protection.

iv) Green belt movement

Another movement, which is one of the biggest in women and environmental history, is the Green Belt movement. The Nobel Prize winner Wangari Maathai founded this movement on the World Environment Day in June 1977. The starting ceremony was very simple: a few women planted seven trees in Maathai’s backyard. By 2005, thirty million trees had been planted by participants in the Green Belt movement on public and private lands. The Green Belt movement aims to bring environmental restoration along with society’s economic growth. 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 planting indigenous trees.

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Box 3.2

A fight to save environment

It was a moment of pride for every Indian woman when in 1995 a scheduled caste, illiterate woman of a Below Poverty Line family from a remote village of Himachal Pradesh with fragile frame was given honour to inaugurate the 4th World Conference on women in Beijing, China. In fact the chief guest was Ms Hillary Clinton, the then first lady of the US. But she invited bare foot environmentalist to light the lamp as she felt her to be the most deserving person. This Great women Environmentalist, died in 2007 at the age of 75 years, Kinkari Devi who belongs to Village Sangrah, District Sirmour of Himachal Pradesh. Kinkari Devi belonged to a poor family where education of girls was considered a foolish and money wasting task, and even they did not have enough resources to make their male child literate. So like other girls, she was left uneducated and got married in her teens. She was forced to work as a daily wages worker but unable to manage even two meals a day for herself and her son. Since childhood, Kinkari Devi had an attachment and love for environment. All these difficulties were also not able to break her bond and relation with ‘Jal, Jungle and Jameen’ (Water, Forest and Land). With courage and determination, she fought a long battle with mining mafia and system to protect the valuable mountains of Himachal Pradesh from getting ruined. Then she decided to make the local people aware and to organize them for the survival of the hills. She held small demonstrations, rallies and speeches with the support of one local NGO. As a result of Kinkari’s determination and courage, local people of the village started supporting her and organized themselves into small groups, which created awareness in other villages. These small groups played a crucial role in making people aware of their rights to have clean environment. She took the case to the High Court. The story of Kinkari Devi is a tale of a true Indian Rural Woman who despite facing different odds did not leave the path of truth. Kinkari Devi explained the reason behind her initiative, “Pahar se hi hamara vajood hai. Pahar nahi honge to hum bhi nahi rahenge.” (Our existence depends on mountains, without mountains our survival is not possible). She said that in her culture, the environment is considered as mother and serving the mother is everybody’s duty. She was honoured by ‘Rani Jhansi Stri Shakti’ awarded by the then Prime Minister of India, Atal Bihari Vajpayee for her invaluable contribution to protect the environment of the region.
**3.9 SUMMARY**

Gender refers to the social roles that men and women play and the power relations between them, which usually have a profound effect on the use and management of natural resources. Nowadays, the relationship between gender and the environment has become more explicit and apparent. The literature on environment and development has particularly stressed that in developing countries like India, women are considered the primary users of natural resources (land, forest and water), because they are the ones who are responsible for gathering food, fuel and fodder. This brings rural women to a close relationship with land and natural resources. Women’s perspective towards the importance of environment/natural resources is somewhat different than that of men. Along with increased production and gain in every respect, women give more consideration to protection and improvement of capacity of Nature and Natural Resources.

**3.10 REFERENCES**


**Suggested Reading**


**Sample Questions**

1) In your opinion briefly describe how gender is related to environmental studies?

2) Critically discuss role of women in gender and water management?

3) What are basic bioenergy resources and how women are involved in bioenergy project as a whole?

4) What is basic personality and modal personality? Discuss

5) What are the major ecological movements in which women were in focal perspective? Describe using example of case studies and major personalities involved in this.