

## **Community Mobilization with Ecofeminist Approach- A Case Study of Pothnal, Karnataka Experience**

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### **Abstract**

The term ecofeminism has existed even before the word was used by French writer Francoise d'Eaubonne in her book, *Le Feminismeou la Mort* (1974). But it is said that it has come to India in the 1970s. It is an umbrella term, the theory of ecofeminism borrowed from feminism and environmentalism. In this research paper the researcher emphasizes more on the connections between women and nature, how environmental ethics were bound with women, mainly rural Karnataka, and also how the environmental movements played a vital role in the lives of women in third world countries like India. It reviews ecological concerns and related issues such as how the male-centered power structures have victimized women and nature, why they have been marginalized, subjugated, and why nature is inferior to culture and women to men. These questions will be examined in this research paper which is also going to discuss the green movements and ecofeminist connections in the Karnataka context.

**Keywords:** Green Movements, Ecofeminism, and ecological concerns, Pothnal, Karnataka Experience

### **Introduction**

The prefix eco comes from ecology a systematic study of living organism and environment. Then feminism is advocacy of women's rights. Environmental destruction and gender oppression led to ecofeminism. The French writer Francoise d'Eaubonne first used the word ecofeminism in her book, *Le Feminismeou la Mort* (1974). It is an umbrella term, the theory of ecofeminism derived from feminism and environmentalism. Green movements and ecofeminism are interconnected. Ritu Dhingra an Ecologist, Environmentalist, and Researcher. Says that Eco-feminism is a movement because it applies feminist principles and ideas to ecological issues. It is a term used to address an integrated relationship between feminist and environmental perspectives. Eco-feminism is an intellectual foundation of ecology and feminism,

which focuses on issues such as women's rights, peace, labor, ecological, and environmental justice.

Environmental movements and participation of women in environmental movements led women to the theory of feminism and environmentalism and practice in a way that the oppression of women and nature are interconnected. The women participation in green movements is not just for name sake it is also the question of their livelihood and survival for life. The concept development has victimized both the women and nature as well. In the name of development, the power of patriarchy and its supportive elements played very vital role in subjugating women and nature.

Globally, the green movements have started with the concern to save nature and its resources. For example, Europe's Anti-Militarist movement and the dumping of hazardous wastes in the US, and Kenya's Green Belt movement claimed as remarkable ecofeminist movements. (Quinby1990) These movements attempt to reveal the 'resistance politics' functioning at the micro-levels of power structures including women and nature as the oppressed and voiced issues. Ecofeminism emerged in the West as an outcome of the peace, feminist and ecological movements of the late 1970s and the early 1980s.

It has witnessed that Indian history concerning green movements and feminism; it is clear that how the green movements have started in India. Why they became important in the lives of humans especially women. Writers like Mahasweta Devi, Medha Patkar, Arundhati Roy, Kamala Das, Vandana Shiva, and many others emphasized more on female/ feminist issues along with ecological issues in their writings. These feminist and environmental issues are crucial because the web of the world is around these. These writers are not only written about the ecological concerns, but they also involved in various environmental movements. For example, Mahasweta Devi who fought for the tribal community rights in Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal, of Indian. Likewise, Vandana Shiva is also involved in the Chipko movement in 1973. She is also an ecofeminist writer. The most respected social activist of the present, Medha Patkar' an activist engaged in Narmada Bachao Andolan. Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) involved in the fight for justice of the dam projects impacted on people, questioning the development paradigm and in reconstruction including educational work. Started in 1985 and the struggle is on with more number of individuals displaced every year increasing. The mentioned activists were not only involved in the environmental movements, but the movements have become part of their lives. These people have emerged as the alternative voice of the biggest protests against the State as that of NBA, Tribal movements of Kerala and Northeast. In examining the distinguished contributions of such brave-hearted women, the present research tries to understand their role of them in the green movements. The researcher also attempts to

understand the fundamental concern of these movements. The mentioned movements are just an ideology or the question of their survival. These issues have examined in this research.

There are few environmental movements in Karnataka, the very important two mentioned. The first one is Appiko Movement started in 1983, which is a non-violent movement led by Panduranga Hegde. Chipko movement of Uttarakhand inspired the movement. The villagers of Uttara Kannada district have participated in this movement and women played a crucial role in this movement this movement is for the protection of the Kalase forest. This movement gave birth to a new awareness all over the south India. The second important environmental movement is Save Tunga River. This movement is started in 1994 most of the women were part of this movement. The main aim of this movement is to save the origin of Tunga River this river takes birth in the Western Ghats in a place Gangamoola. Due to the iron mining activity, the origin of the river polluted, so the group of people has started the movement. Ponnamma the freedom fighter, Parvathi women leader, Manjula Devi, Hemalatha Shanai an activist, were part of this movement.

Sumi Krishna an environmentalist, independent researcher and a writer, in his book *Environmental Politics* (1996). He argues that Indian environmental movements have to understand the politics of development to change the term development in India. To strengthen the environmental movements, they should get into the field of political resist. And it should join the hands with more precise political movements, and its dialogue must be allied with the discourses of supremacy and justice.

Likewise, many other ecofeminist theoreticians also had similar interpretations. According to Ashok Swain in his book *Environment & Conflict: Analyzing the Developing World* (1993). The recent years witnessed the remarkable increase in green movements in our country. Such movements have brought collectively the economically weaker and socially marginalized people from all over the country to defend their safety and existence. Protests on environmental issues have created a very stern dispute to the majority developmental processes. The struggle of tribals against Iron mining in Northeast is a few mentions.

## **Research Methodology**

### **About the Selected Community**

The time constraints made the researcher to investigate one particular women organization which is making changes. Jagratha Mahila Sanghatane in Manvi Taluk of Raichur, Karnataka state has been chosen as the researcher was able to visit the place during the course of this time. The Raichur district is considered one of the most backward districts of Karnataka State, which are going to discuss in detail in the findings section.

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## **Methodology Employed**

The current research has followed participatory and observational method. The participatory methodology is one of the methods used in many disciplines, especially in cultural anthropology. Here in this research, the researcher adopted a kind of field research. In this, the researcher investigated and studied the life of a group which has shared their activities.

## **Objective of the Study**

The objectives of the survey focus on the local experiences of women in a particular group.

- Look at the ecofeminism in the local level.
- Understand the marginalization of communities, and how it could bring to the mainstream.
- Understand the local women experience of nature and survival at the global scale.

## **Women Trainers in the Organization Included in the Research**

The women listed below are mostly illiterates, and they give training to the other self-help groups. They organize melas, health camps, and they travel all over India to sell their products.

1. Sunandamma
2. Lakshamma
3. Mayamma
4. Sulochamma
5. Sushila
6. Devi

## **Ecofeminist Intervention for Community Mobilization**

In Raichur district, there is a Taluk called Manvi where the Devadasi system is practicing even today. And in this Taluk, there is a village called Pothnal. The total population of the village is 13000; Men are 7000, and women 6000. 40 percent Dalits were there in the village, and major Dalit communities are Maadiga, Cheluvadi, and Maadigavadda. (Devi Puthra a villager and staff at JMS organization. Women of this village were completely marginalized and subjugated with male supremacy. Every year 4 to 5 atrocities will take place in the village. A group of youth decided to adopt this village to step in development communication. In the year 1996, this group of volunteers who were actively involved in Narmada Bachao Andolan of Sardar Sarovar project have established a women organization JMS (Jagrutha Mahila Sanghatana). The group formed in 2000. In the initial period, the focus was on problems of the community and their basic needs. Later on, they shifted their focus towards economic

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independence of the community for this the organization initiated few experiments. Without making an oppressed community economically and socially self-sustainable, the larger resistance would not arise as it could not sustain. With this intention, the group decided to take few steps before directly stepping into more significant societal changes. For example; they started skill training programs to women groups, started self-help groups which are helped the women to have a little economic independence. Financial independence made them take the other crucial social issues for the consideration. The relevant majors have initiated by the women community in the village are: women were started to protest against the alcoholism in the village, child marriage and child labor practices in the village. The crucial and addressable problem is practicing Devadasi system. The very unscientific practice of Devadasi is opposed by the community and have protested against such social practices. Later on, the women have understood the importance of the self-economy and started to produce Neem oil for agriculture, hair oil, and Terracotta jewels. After this, they began to produce ayurvedic medicines and established a small hospital. In this hospital, they only sell the medicines in the shift wise. They are not literates but still they were able to sell medicines correctly. Now the people are coming across for the treatment. They use only the available local natural herbs to make medicines. They treat the significant disease like Asthma, white patches, Jaundice, T B, Pits and so on. This study is all about the village women and their strength of self-reliance and self-sustainability from 2002 till date.

### **Ecofeminism in Karnataka and Women Groups**

The village which has taken for the research was very patriarchal, and women had no right to speak about anything not only in public but also in their family. The condition of the women is same one or other way globally. The current research is where the women group has self-sustained and given employment to the several other women and SHGs in Manvi Taluk. The organization works for the Dalit women and economically weaker section of the village. When the work started in 2000, the more importance has given to the strengthening women financially which is essential to a person, later on, the organization focused for the self-sustenance of the community. Then they started to give skill training to active women. The paramount fact is these women don't know reading and writing. First, they began to produce Neem oil for farmers, and then the Terracotta jewels after that Ayurvedic medicines. Now they sell all these all over the district and Terracotta jewels nationally. The truth is they have employed several women groups, and they train today for such groups. The women team in Pothnal also encourages for the organic agriculture, and they grow Foxtail millet, (Navane) Pearl millet, (Sajje) and Raagi without using chemicals in their available fields. Through this, they are challenging to the current world where everyone using a large amount of chemicals and pesticides in the agriculture. Today they are growing their crops without using any chemicals in their fields, in this way they found their livelihood without harming the nature and their environment as well. The community and

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the women are not aware of any feminist theories or not involved in environmental movements. But the need of food and shelter made them understand the nature. The truth of these examples had not documented in any texts, but still, they are livening in a very respectful life without any ideologies and theories. Why can't we call it as ecofeminism a different perspective? Like such, there are several examples all over the world, but we only consider the recorded cases and again neglect the real facts. The aim of the researcher is to bring the light on these issues in which these women also concerned about nature, and they are living with nature and for nature. They know the real value of nature as their livelihood.

My argument is here, let's consider such women communities and bring them to the mainstream where the others have also followed them to save nature and find solutions for the problems causing the nature and women as well.

### **Findings**

The women from Pothnal village are very independent and self-sustains today. When the volunteers initiated to establish a women organization there the women are like very innocent and were not aware of anything around them. But the after the establishment of the organization the women's perspective towards their lives has been changed. For example, before they were not coming out of the houses for any problems, they were almost imprisoned in their houses. Their only job is working in the fields all day and working at home in the evenings. The organization gathered them at one place in the evenings whenever possible and spoke with them about their needs and strengths. After two years of the establishment of the organization, women were aware of few things happening around them and started to respond to such problems. And later they realized the problems of the individuals are also the problem of the community. Accordingly, they began to think about solutions for such problems.

### **The Important Changes Emerged in Their Lives are**

1. They started to send their girl children to school
2. They opposed for child marriage and child labor
3. They found their economy which is independent
4. They started to live harmony with nature.
5. They started to live with self-sustainability.
6. Traveling all over the country to market their products.
7. They are aware of their rights.
8. Living life with dignity.
9. Their skills are improved.

## Limitations of the Study

The researcher has limitations of the study why because, the availability of the time for the research. The researcher could have more focus on the women community of JMS organization in Pothnal. The community which has to sustain from more than 16 years without depending on any other capitalist pressures. And they are teaching lessons to the society with mentioned examples.

## Conclusion

To conclude, the women from this village are one or other way living with nature where they are protecting the nature with their limited knowledge and through their daily activities. They grow their food naturally and respect the nature. The same idea, Dr. Vandana Shiva argued about the local need and the sustainable methods. The women in this village are more aware of the issues around, and they instantly respond to the uncertain social issues happening around them. Here we can remember Mahasweta Devi's strong belief on women empowerment which helps them to protect nature and its resources. The same way this small group of women was the best example of Gandhi's Grama Swaraj, which nobody depends on anybody for their survival, especially on capitalism. Even illiterate women can understand and find solutions for their problems, and we should look at such examples as models and bring light on them and also document such examples for the future research and further reading.

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