

CHAPTER-V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The overall attempt of the present study is to analyse the comprehensive picture of the ecological crisis and not in isolation so as to cover not just the structures of the natural environment but also those of cultural patterns of human thought and perception. It is also to make an inclusive in-depth analysis of the crisis without any gender bias. According to scientific point of view, the causes of ecological crisis can be attributed to many factors such as severe pollution, deforestation, and exploitation of natural resources and resulting global warming etc. The religious and cultural standpoints assert that it is the massive failure of humans that they were not able to live up to their rich religious traditions and resulting in their sheer egoism dominating the life-giving nature as well as women.

Ecological crisis is often believed to be the ultimately a crisis of wholeness, which created a web between humans and environment and also completely separating the male category from the female and continuing oppressing the latter. It is the complete denial of the inherent worth of both nature and women that led to the global degradation. The main problem has been the idea of considering both nature and women as objects of the male dominated society. Their value and relationship continue to be manipulated and exploited to a great extent. This relationship is not just environmental but also historical, social, political and religious which is deep rooted in the wrong foundations of what humans perceive of reality. Although all this has resulted in the evolution of technically productive society but at the same time which is insensitive to the needs of the women, putting a veil on gender inequality and terming it as natural. If analysed from this perspective, the factors such as the environment, women and religion are strongly interlinked.

In the first chapter of the thesis, the aim, scope and methodology etc. of the research study have been discussed. Chapter two emphasises the point that development purely on the basis of technological growth, is so deteriorative for society which includes the problems like resource depletion, pollution and destruction of social relations. The next chapter asserts that the present model of development which is heavily tilted towards male-dominated technocracy also termed as

development as patriarchy project, has led to some erosion of the social status of women, leading to other major impacts like devaluing ‘women’s work and knowledge, impoverishment and feminization of poverty, poor health conditions for women, weakening of women’s opportunities and displacement and alienation of women from their natural environment’.

Fourth chapter deals with field observations and emphasises that Ecology is a web of relationships and so the ecological crisis implies that there is a serious deterioration of the condition of women as well, as well as misbalancing the social and cultural web of relationships. When nature is subjugated according to human ends for their undue profit motives, it ultimately leads to subjugation of the powerless women folk already being dominated by male dominated society. Analysing ecological crisis means deep analysis of the social status of women against the backdrop of patriarchal society, and it can be anywhere in the world: Indian or western.

The interconnectedness between so called development on the one hand and the denudation of Nature with the oppressed status of women in society on the other are basically behind the crisis of the environment, there is need for analysis of iterative perspectives. In this regard it is important to consider the perspectives of the feminists’ revealing lot of potentials for a holistic response. The feminists overall believe that the ecological crisis is deeply linked with the oppressive status of women in society. They believe women are an extension of Mother Nature. They both mutually sustain each other in mode of living in harmony. Thus, the question of ecological imbalance is simultaneously an issue of reconsidering the factual degraded status of women in the light of equality and justice. The more the natural environment is deprived of the relation to women, deeper is the degradation of the environment. The Fourth Chapter makes a critical examination of this attempt.

The present study has been conducted to examine the impact of ecological imbalance on women in the district of Sirmaur. Growing population and technological advancement are continuously putting a strain on the ecosystem. Man has been over-exploiting the rich resources of nature to satisfy his insatiable greed which has resulted in environmental degradation. Although the resources are used by men and women in dissimilar ways yet they are impacted differently. Women share a closer

relationship with nature as they have direct contact with natural resources like land, water, fuel, fodder, twigs, medicinal herbs etc. especially in rural areas where 70 percent of the Indian population reside and directly dependent upon natural resources for their survival. Any kind of ecological imbalance affects the survival of womenfolk directly or indirectly. Women have been taking a lead in the conservation and protection of the environment.

The broad objective of this study was to analyse the impact of ecological imbalance on women and also to identify barriers in maintaining ecological balance in the area of study. The study further tries to assess the role of women and initiatives taken by government authorities to involve women as a decision- maker in ecological matters.

The study was based on the observations from the field. In order to collect and compile the observations, mixed methodology was followed - quantitative as well as qualitative. Two types of tools were used in the study. The first one being the interview based on a questionnaire with open-ended questions. The questions were primarily aimed at knowing first the impact of ecological imbalance on women and secondly how women can play a significant role in the maintaining ecological balance. The sub-themes of the questionnaire included- the level of women's awareness and activeness with regard to ecologically disturbing matters, role and responsibilities related with ecological protection, the responsibility of government and NGOs in protecting ecology. It also dealt with the issues like what kind of action they prefer to take to protect nature, impact of religion on the environment and challenges they face while becoming assertive in environmental matters, impact of women's participation in governance on environmental matters as well as on their upliftment. Thus, the questionnaire gave a comprehensive view of women- nature relationship and role of women in the protection of the environment.

The second tool used was the Focused Group Discussion (FGD). FGDs are a very important tool in order to ascertain views about any issue at the community level. Interviews helped in getting the individualistic view and FGD's helped in getting the comprehensive view. In this study too, FGDs were conducted with school teachers, members of panchayat, NGOs and civil society people and also with women local leaders. This helped in getting the overall situation in the selected areas and also

making oneself familiar with people in the area which helped in conducting the interviews smoothly.

Paonta Sahib and Sangrah were selected as the areas of study. These two are among the six tehsils of the district of Sirmaur in Himachal Pradesh. Paonta Sahib is an industrial hub with many manufacturing and industrial units which exposes its residents with many ecological issues. Sangrah is basically mountainous with rough terrains and is rural with an agricultural-based economy but limestone mining is quite rampant here. Majority of the women work in the fields and thus also get affected due to environment-related issues.

Important findings

The findings of the study with respect of the two major components of the objectives of the research are given below:

1. Awareness

Women in the areas of study were quite aware about the various developmental works in their area and their impact on the ecosystem of the area. The level of awareness regarding ecological crisis among women in the study area was high as majority of them work in fields and directly or indirectly dependent on the environmental resources.

2. Participation

Women in Paonta Sahib and Sangrah are fully active in dealing with any issue related to the environment. They do not wait for the government to take action rather they tackle issues on their own with the support of NGOs. Majority of the women are active members of any sort of NGOs which are functional in lending its support to women and ecological matters. Thus, women's participation in taking action and measures in the areas of study is remarkable.

In fact, women are the real managers and conservators of the environmental resources as they are directly or indirectly dependent on natural resources. Any ecological crisis affects women differently than men. Women just need to own and control resources in their hands to conserve and protect the environment. They also

need to be at helm in any institutional mechanism for administration of environmental resources, be it water, land, forests or common property resources.

The field work chapter based on interview schedule has come out with the following findings:

- Women in the selected regions were quite aware about the ongoing development projects in the regions especially about the construction of Dam and their related impacts on the ecosystem of the area.
- Women were quite aware about the fact that the more dependent a livelihood on nature is the graver will be the impacts of ecological disturbance on their lives. In the selected regions women were more and more dependent on agriculture and any disturbance to the land like construction of a dam nearby, excessive use of fertilisers, mechanisation of agriculture, all disturbs the environment as well as their lives.
- Women in the affected regions have taken full active participation to deal with the problem. Instead of being dependent on the Government to take action, they have themselves organised protests and been successful in many of them. Respondents were of the view that they have participated through environmental protests, have been part of the environmental organisation, taking part in environmental training programmes and also like filing petitions, sending grievance letters, holding meetings etc.
- Government actions taken till now are not sufficient to deal with the problem of such magnitude. Most of the protests organised against the commercialisation of the environment are led by NGOs and this fact has been corroborated by the majority of women interviewed.
- Migration is the major effect of environmental problems. People start migrating as they are left with no other option but the trend of women headed families, single mother households is increasing in Himachal. Another effect pointed out by the people is the displacement in some cases. They don't migrate but are displaced from their original places thus disturbing their cultural, emotional, personal ties with that region. Third important factor is the

health of the women as the women suffer many health problems from fetching water, fuel and fodder from long distances.

- No doubt the environment affects the lives of women to a great extent but women with their exemplary work have shown that their efforts can influence the ecosystem of their region in a positive way. So, when asked about who should be at the forefront to deal with the environmental crisis, majority women said that they themselves are responsible for their lives. Women should themselves bear the burden of taking action against this problem then only they can expect others to follow. Change always starts with one's own self. They need to break out of their cocoon and shed the cultural boundaries and be the change they wish to see in the world.
- Major factor hampering their active participation is the cultural taboo. Majority of women interviewed complain that the gender defined roles of women to be the house-bearers and the men to work outside really restrict their real growth and development. Another reason highlighted was the lack of formal education i.e. illiteracy is another factor becoming an obstacle in their participation in decision-making regarding their environment.
- Women know about the efforts being made by the government in order to protect the environment especially in their regions in forms of policies, programmes, schemes, awards, projects and the provision of ecological rights. It was found that the majority of women were aware about whatever big or small was being done by the government for the protection of the environment and it was laudable for them but they just wanted that government should double the efforts.
- According to the majority of interviewed women, more and more participation of women in governance in one form or the other will lead to an increase in women assertion to a great extent. All other women feel motivated and they are encouraged to come forward and polish their skills and be the leader in the world they wish to live in. Another positive thing resulting from women participation in governance will be that the quality of work will not be compromised.

Women and Environmental Resources

In the environmental resources sector, the relationship between women and natural resources is influenced by the existing gender-based division of responsibilities and roles. Men play a dominant role in the usage of natural resources for commercial gains, while women are generally responsible for the domestic use of resources. Thus, for instance, storing seeds, weeding, mending and making fishing nets are mainly done by womenfolk while actual acts of fishing and ploughing are men's jobs.

Getting water and medicinal herbs from local forests for homes are part of women's household duties, especially in rural areas and among the urban poor. Since 'providing' for the house is a man's job, men are responsible for sales. Women can sell fish in local markets but not in commercial markets. While commercial production of energy is mostly a man's job, providing biomass-based cooking fuel is the responsibility of women.

In rural households and among the urban poor, women's household duties comprise of fetching water and firewood, fodder, medicinal herbs from local forests for homes. Man's job is 'to provide' so basically men take the responsibility of sales. Women can't sell the kitchen and forest products in the commercial markets but can access only the local market. It is the man's job to commercially produce the energy rather women are entitled to provide biomass-based cooking fuel.

For the same reasons, the male members usually own the resources and have the authority to make decisions on their usage. There is a broad gap in the ownership of assets, such as poultry, land, kitchen gardens and even leases on common property resources (CPRs), such as pasture lands, wastelands, green and degraded forests, ponds and canals. In different agro-climatic zones, the roles of gender also differ. In harsher agro-climatic zones- arid and hill regions where resources are limited, women work more than men in fields and for providing basic needs and requirements. The impact of ecological imbalance is directly affecting women's work and deteriorates their quality of life.

As women are mainly responsible for managing households with their services, they need to 'own' LPG and water supply connections in their names, get

direct subsidies for buying improved cook stoves and for building toilets. This will enable them to have economic control over such services as women generally manage household budgets. Therefore, ecological protection and conservation of natural resources cannot be done without the involvement of women in planning and training for the promotion of values for conservation. Hence, an attempt has been made to evaluate the role of women in ecological protection and conservation along with suitable strategies for the same.

Lacunas

In the agrarian and allied areas, the contribution of women is generally unnoticed and generally they are kept out of decision-making. Still, they do not officially possess or own the resources, even though statutes have been formed and accordingly policy articulations have been progressive. The programmes and schemes related with agriculture are partial and biased toward male farmers and the market forces in operation- favouring cash crops over food crops, larger markets over village marts, timber markets over markets for non-timber forest products, farmland over kitchen gardens, large animals over small animals, large scale fishing overland fishing. As a result, women are generally deprived of ownership which usually vests in male hands and thus male get the authorisation to make decisions regarding the resources. The promotion of chemical-based agriculture mode is also preferred by male farmers as women folk, involved in subsistence, organic and low input mode of farming.

Improved Gender-based Disaggregated Data to Sustain Environmental Resources

One of the major reasons for the lacuna in planning originates from gaps in data of gender, like ownership details of assets or right capture of the extent of female's work, mostly under-reported. Women perceive themselves as mere housewives and thus under-estimate their own work and such mindset becomes a part of the problem. But, the government's refusal to identify women as forest workers, farmers, livestock managers or fisher folk in their own right despite progressive policies, must share the blame.

On paper, the government identifies that rural women are the 'backbone of Indian agricultural workforce' and 'the most productive workforce', But this is not

reflected in practice where women in agriculture and allied activities cannot directly utilise and access government programmes and policies or lay claim to public resources. This failure to identify and address issues of women's work and their role has led to their greater dependence on the environment.

Recommendations

1. Integrate women's empowerment with climate change and sustainable development.
2. Adopt an environment - based, women-led model of sustainable growth and development.
3. Women must constitute at least 50 per cent in all organisations and institutions using environmental resources, like agricultural cooperative societies, forest management and rights committees, water user associations and biodiversity management committees.
4. Integrate gender approach and perspectives into disaster management programmes and policies of India.
5. Institute an inter-ministerial coordination council to put in place an environment-centred, women-led model of climate change mitigation and sustainable development with an action plan and in-built monitoring mechanisms.
6. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) must jointly address climate change and environmental issues with other ministries of Environment, Agriculture, Rural Development, Forests and Panchayati Raj.

At the Policy Level

1. Women must be in top positions related to governance of natural resource management.
2. Adopt a gender framework to execute climate change mitigation with special programmes and policies for women in a disaster condition- disaster management starting with prevention.

3. The Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women should assess gender implications of the plans and also must examine the implementation of plans on women.
4. Gender- based capacities and vulnerabilities for climate-related solutions must be mapped by NAPCC (The National Action Plan on Climate Change) and SAPCC (State Action Plan on Climate Change) to succeed.
5. Institute grassroots- level mechanisms to address ecological degradation, with involvement of majority of women.
6. Initiate large- scale time use surveys to study the relationship between women and the environment.
7. Include poor farm- based females through panchayat – level equivalent local action programmes and plans on Natural Resources Management (NRM) to address water- land-forests-biodiversity.

Government Initiatives

Government programmes and plans must enable women to possess, own, access and control a variety of economically productive assets, like livestock, land, forests, and leases on water bodies and common land.

1. Government programmes must encourage and enable women to set up enterprises, such as production of low-input farm inputs, food processing and forest- based produce.
2. The Ministry of Agriculture must acknowledge the role of women in the conservation of forest resources and engage them in planning, policy- making and implementation.
3. The government must ensure general provision of environmental services like clean drinking water, clean energy for basic needs like cooking, in toilets for all households, eradication of indoor pollution as its utmost priorities. This will also involve small rainwater harvesting structures, improved land-water management, and local schemes to recharge groundwater in order to the betterment of the asset base of a large number of small holders.

4. The government must encourage ecological farming methods and promote crop diversity, as they have a larger role for women than industrial agriculture and also, they are employment intensive.
5. The government must execute the principles of ‘polluter pays’ and ‘precautionary approach’ in order to regulate hazardous industries and technologies, and strictly implement the environmental laws, with redress and liability.
6. Gender impact assessment must be made part of the environmental impact assessments such as GMOs and agro-chemicals. Without the inclusion of gender impact assessment, the environmental impact assessment (EIA) should not be accepted.
7. The government programmes and policies must equip young women and girls with requisite training, skills and infrastructural support and placement in major administrative and technical decision-making positions as women play a significant role in agriculture, livestock and fisheries.
8. The government must provide secure rights over land and other such productive resources and create opportunities to significantly improve income from farms to ensure that the better educated and younger women generation take to agriculture.

General Recommendations and Concluding Remarks

It is also important to make apparent the links between gender and the environment, and what could be the possible trade-offs. A proper analysis should be done to suggest a systematic gender analysis of environmental work to make possible improvements not only for women but also for sustainably managing the environment. This analysis should show how both women and men can make their contributions to environmental problems?

There is a need to collect sex-disaggregated data to enable analysis of environmental factors on the basis of gender. These gender- based data are important in order to find the missing links, track change and measure the impact. There should be more and more advocacy of gender action plans in all government as well non-government environmental organisations so as to ensure that action plans are formulated on the basis of Gender and are also used in dialogue with other donors.

There is an urgent need to review international organisations and their gender policies, and efforts should be made to ensure these are effectively implemented. Focus should be on how gender policies should be finalised, might be implemented and then finally operationalised. After that monitoring and evaluation systems should also be in place and can be designed in such a way as to make the system answerable for lack of effectiveness of environmental programmes.

There is a need for the full inclusion of women in decision making processes at all levels. This includes ‘environmental planning, financing, gender budgeting, and policy-making’. Full-on promotion should be done for women’s equal participation in all the environmental and climate change negotiations at the national as well as international level. Even the policy making at the national, local and international level should include women in equal numbers. At local level Women’s equal participation becomes very critical as it is here, we need real empowerment so that the fruits of development trickle down to the lowest of the segments. In this regard, community based organisations can be very useful in the identification of strategies and techniques.

There is a need to adopt targeted approaches that specifically focus on women and girls’ specific interests, their overall vulnerabilities and needs. All the policies and interventions should cater to the distinct needs and arrange for specific resources and services especially targeting women and girls. In this regard, technological solutions can be of great help as these help in providing efficiency gains for women which can have a very positive impact on health and well-being. Arrange finance for those women who are working for ecological causes especially at the grass root level. The constraints faced by women entrepreneurs both formal and informal constraints can hamper their access to financing and capital. Thus, there is a need to create an enabling environment for budding women’s entrepreneurs by providing them full access to financing and commercial markets which will help in speeding up the progress on gender in the environment.

Even Women’s organisations should be having access to financing for environmental work, and their opinions should be taken into consideration for the formulation of environmental strategies. This may a different target-based approach like opening a window exclusively for women only and then monitoring whether the

programme's benefits and finances available reaches women and women's organisations. Involve women in learning the usage of environmentally sound technologies. Technology nowadays is becoming really critical to mitigating and adapting to climate change. But it is important to ensure that technologies are always context sensitive, that women's inherent knowledge and sense of innovation capacity is effectively utilised and that women and men should have access to adaptation information at par with each other. It is believed that getting skills to use environmentally sound technologies can open a new window for women's participation and leadership.