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WOMEN & NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: LEARNINGS FROM THE RECENT ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT IN BALARAMPUR VILLAGE, DHENKANAL, ODISHA

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Abstract

The environmental movement can be defined as a social or political movement for the Protection of environment or for the improvement of the state of the environment. For recent period the issues like biodiversity loss, deforestation, environmental pollution and degradation, ecological crisis have received wider concern and therefore several environmental protests, movements are taking place in order to protect the environment and to conserve the forests and natural resources. Quiet notably, many of these movements are following Gandhian nonviolent tradition and being led by women. At this premises this study aims to draw attention towards the most recent environmental movement led by women at Balarampur village in Odisha to save Jhinkargadi forest against the government's decision to set up a beer factory in that forest. The objectives of this study are to find out the reasons behind the protest of cutting trees as being called as "The New Chipko", to examine the role of women in Natural Resource Management and Afforestation and to analyze how eco-pedagogy can be included in the school curriculum as a tool for generating environmental awareness. This study had been conducted at Balarampur village in Dhenkanal, Odisha through the case study method. It is found that the villagers have been conserving the forest and natural resources since 1972 and women have active participation in that process. From the light of certain observation, this study suggests to develop a curriculum of eco-pedagogy which can be included in school curriculum to make learners aware about the environmental issues and to prepare them in dealing with those situations in order to promote sustainability.

Keywords: *Women, Natural Resource Management, Environmental movement, Eco-pedagogy*

Introduction

In the contemporary world industry, urbanization, capitalism, privatization and population explosion have destroyed our environment and natural resources on such a large-scale that to solve all these challenges it requires long-term treatment as stated by Hosseinnezhad (2017) [2]. Today the Importance and critical role of the environment and natural resource management in the development of different countries, especially in third world countries have received wider concern as mentioned by Koochi (2014) [8]. Therefore many environmental movements, protests, campaigns re taking place worldwide in order to protect Mother Nature, natural resources and to ensure sustainability. Raimi (2019) [15] reported that women play a crucial role in environmental management, sustainable development due to their active involvement in conservation activities and management of the environment. Raimi (2019) [15] also mentioned that majority of indigenous and rural women all over the world with poor health and work conditions, limited access to education and low income taking active part in these environmental protests

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and movements in order to protect their livelihood opportunities that are dependent upon natural resources. Mago (2019) [9] concluded that in India where 70% of population is concentrated in rural areas women have direct contact with natural resources like fuel, food and fodder, forest, water and land especially to satisfy the basic needs of their families. During 17th century it was considered that women have no role in environmental conservation and promotion, But after 18th and 19th century with spreading awareness about. Besides, in recent years woman have also played a leadership role for conservation and enhancement of environment (Mago 2019) [9]. Quiet notably, many of these movements are following Gandhian nonviolent tradition .Moolakkattu (2019) [12] stated that most of the environmental movements in India followed Gandhian ideology focusing on non-violence, disobedience, peaceful strike by involving local community members, women, local activists, tribal and indigenous people against destruction of forests and environment by government and corporate houses.

Balarampur village, situated 20 km away from the district headquarters of Dhenkanal and 80 km from Odisha's capital city of Bhubaneswar, has given birth to a success story while remembering of the famous Chipko movement (Mahapatra, 2018) [10]. Since 1972, the villagers of Balarampur village situated in Dhenkanal district, Odisha had been protecting and patrolling the local Jhinkargadi forest, expanding in over 243 hectares of land in order to conserve forest and its resources, water and environment [3]. About 30 per cent of the population in Balarampur comprised of Schedule Caste and Scheduled Tribes. Many of these families' livelihoods also depended on forest natural resources [5]. The trees of the Jhinkargadi forest had been nurtured for three generations by the villagers of Balarampur for more than four decades especially women had been involved in taking care of the forest and its resources [4]. Not only are the forest a source of livelihood to the villagers, it was also an important elephant corridor. Barik (2018) [1] stated that the forest had been a site of dispute between the villagers and the government since the state run Odisha Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation, the nodal agency for facilitating land for industries, had shown interest in acquiring the land as a land bank for industrial projects. On November 7, 2018 Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik inaugurated a 102 crore brewery project to be established by P&A Bottles in Jhinkargadi forest and the project required 12 acres of forest land with a loss of nearly 5,000 trees. Pradhan (2018) [14] reported that on 17 November, 2018, hundreds of villagers of Balarampur village in Dhenkanal district of central Odisha clashed with the police to prevent felling of sal trees in the old forest of Jhinkargadi and the villagers of Balarampur mostly women did not let the administration take possession of the land and they physically hugged the trees and prevented anyone from cutting the sal trees. Later, the Government postponed the project but the environmental protest led by women of Balarampur has received more recognition as being called as "A New Chipko".

Objectives of the Study

At this premises the study aimed:

1. To find out the reasons behind the protest of cutting trees as being called as "A New Chipko".
2. To examine the role of women in Natural Resource Management and Afforestation.
3. To analyze how Eco-pedagogy can be included in the school curriculum as a tool for generating environmental awareness.

Research Methodology

The study had been conducted at Balarampur village in Dhenkanal district, Odisha following the case study method. 20 villagers (16 female and 4 male) were selected as a sample for this study using purposive sampling technique. Data is collected through unstructured interviews, self-developed questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions (FDGs).The investigator also recorded video and audio clips of interviews and FDGs and also took photographs and field notes for better understanding and evidence.

Results and Discussions

Here the investigator made an attempt to analyze the data collected from the respondents through unstructured interviews, self-developed questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions (FDGs).

1) The reasons behind the protest of cutting trees as being called as “A New Chipko”:

The old Jhinkargadi forest had been protected by the villagers mostly women whose livelihood depends on the abounding sal trees. Covering an area of over 243 hectares, the forest was a common property resource for Balarampur and some 10 other neighbouring villages. The government’s decision to hand it over to a private contractor, Kolkata-based P&A Bottlers, to repurpose it as a beer factory, met with severe agitations and protests from the community as stated by Mitra, P (2018) [11]. “The forest is our life,” Chaturi Sahu, 70, told by hugging a tree along with other women from her village and thus the concept of A New Chipko movement has been emerged. Long back in 1973 the Chipko movement was taken place in Uttarakhand that practiced non-violence agitation where women played vital roles, including Gaura Devi, Suraksha Devi, Sudesha Devi, Bachni Devi and Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Virushka Devi and others in order to protect forests against commercial logging and most importantly the name ‘Chipko’ came from the word ‘embrace’, as the women hugged the trees to prevent them from being cut [4]. Here also with a resemblance woman of Balarampur village hugged the trees to protect them. Purna Khuntia stated that since she was dependent on forest resources such as fruits, medicinal herbs, sal leaves for her livelihood she could not let others to touch a single tree of jhinkargadi forest and called the forest as her mother. Sushanta Kumar Dhala, Secretary of Balarampur Gramya Parichalana Parishad (BGPP) reported that most of the women of Balarampur village had no idea about the concept of Chipko movement that happened in long back but since women considered the forest as their mother and the tress as their children they were adamant to prevent the tress from felling down and hugged the tress with compassion and feelings. Subhadra Rout, 50 mentioned that sal trees were being nurtured by their ancestors and also by them with care and affection and when all of a sudden she got to know that tree cutters had already felled hundreds of trees in the forest which she considered to be her own child she became furious and ran towards the forest with other women to protect their forest and ended up with hugging the tress. Apart from the forest, many other concerns were also raised by the villagers, including the depleting groundwater level and social security. Ambika Prasad Jena, president of the Anchalik Surakhsha and Bikash Manch stated that there was water scarcity in the village every summer and the beer unit could dry up the underground water, causing more challenges to the villagers. He further added that the villagers had carried out an anti-liquor movement in the village in order to ensure women safety and village security along with environmental conservation. Hence, there were many environmental, social and economic issues were embedded behind the protest called as “A New Chipko”.

2) The role of women in Natural Resource Management and Afforestation

Joshi (2015) [7] stated that women play an important role in natural resources management as they have the knowledge and experience gained from working closely with their environment, and their skills can play a pivot role in developing water and forest resources in a sustainable manner. From the very beginning the women of Balarampur village had been deeply engaged in patrolling, protecting, managing resources of jhinkargadi forest and also had been involved in decision making process by taking active part as members of Balarampur Gramya Parichalana Parishad (BGPP) and forest conservation committee. The study results revealed that women of the village had an average sense of belonging to the water and forest management activities and they had formed their own committee to collect and use natural forest resources purposefully. Babita Patra stated that not a single branch was allowed to be cut without the permission of village committee and only a small patch was utilised by the villagers to meet their firewood needs. She further added that if any tree was being cut for emergency purpose then afforestation had to be done immediately keeping in mind the importance of forest conservation. Chintamani Sethi, a village elder reported that after 40 years of such diligent protection, the forest adjacent to Balarampur had not only become dense sal forest, it had also turned into a corridor for wild elephants and it was a source of income for many of the poor family. Sethi had also mentioned that since widows, poor women and housewives were dependent upon forest resources for their livelihood or some sorts of income they knew the value of afforestation and environmental conservation in true sense. Women played the primary role of natural resource management as they were the majority of workers on the land and they were responsible for growing and collecting food, medicines, fuel, housing materials, providing cash income

for schooling, health care and other family needs as stated by Kalpana Patra. Further, in the study area the role of women in leadership, decision making and managing process was found to be more prominent irrespective of social class and gender dominance.

3) Eco-pedagogy to be included in the school curriculum as a tool for generating environmental awareness

From the collected data it is found that villagers of Balarampur had strong senses of environmental protection and sustainable management of natural resources in all aspects. Sushanta Kumar Dhala, Secretary, Balarampur Gramya Parichalana Parishad (BGPP) reported that there are very few dense forests left in India which were not in the direct control of the forest department but protected by rural community and Jhinkargadi was one of them. Ambika Jena, a retired teacher had also admitted that nowadays it was an urgent need to conserve our forest and natural resources for the sustainable development. He further stated that young generations must know the need and importance of conservation and resource management as all our wellbeing largely embedded in nature. Majority of the women admitted that Jhinkargadi forest was the heart of their village and young generations were needed to come forward and take active part in conservation process to deal with unemployment, poverty, environmental degradation and resource depletion. They also considered environmental education and the concept of eco-pedagogy as useful tools for generating awareness among young people. Jayanta Dhal reported that many of the young members of the village were not coming forward in this conservation process unlike their ancestors because there was lack of awareness among them. He had also admitted that schools must take the responsibility to prepare young generations which required eco-pedagogy to be included in classroom transactions. Babita Patra, a graduate and Ambika Jena suggested that teachers should implement teaching strategies linked with local and global ecological and environmental problems to make learners understand those critically and to make learners capable to deal with those challenges with innovative ideas. Rekha Dhal stated that without co-operation, consciousness and awareness nothing could be possible so in school students must learn something beyond their bookish knowledge. Further, most of the villagers mentioned the requirements to include local level environmental agitations and movements in school curriculum to generate awareness.

Major Findings

- 1) Being called as “A New Chipko” the movement in Balarampur village had strong links with Gandhian philosophy of non-violence by women hugging the trees from felling down.
- 2) Women led sustained agitation against the habit of alcoholism and broadened the agenda of the movement by covering other environmental, economic and social issues such as women safety, village protection, and water and forest resource conservation, women empowerment.
- 3) Women clearly outdo men in terms of their involvement in water and forest resource management and conservation. Women participation in decision making process and leadership as members of forest resource management committee ensured gender equity in sustainable management and livelihood opportunities.
- 4) Women had strong senses of environmental awareness and global ecological crisis and they admitted that there is an urgent need of eco-pedagogy to be included in the school curriculum as a tool for generating awareness among future generations.

Educational Implications

1. The results of the study would be a pathway to integrate women, including indigenous women, their perspectives and knowledge, on an equal basis with men, in decision-making regarding sustainable resource management and the development of policies and programmes for sustainable development in future.
2. The study could be useful for researchers, policy makers, NGO workers to evaluate policies and programmes in terms of environmental impact and women’s equal access to and use of natural resources.

3. The study results would be effective in developing strategies for change to eliminate all obstacles to women's full and equal participation in sustainable development and equal access to and control over resources.
4. The study would be beneficial for development of women's equal access to renewable sources, through participatory needs assessments, planning and policy formulation at the local and national level with scopes for training and empowerment.
5. Lastly, the study results would promote the concept of eco-pedagogy as a strategy to be implemented in schools to educate young generations relating to the natural environment so that they can critically analysis environmental challenges and can be able to come up with innovative ideas to solve those. Teachers, researchers, policy makers, curriculum developers, educators can get an idea about the need of eco-pedagogy in current situation and people will get to know about rural and local environmental movements mainly led by women as relevant examples in solving environmental issues.

Conclusion

The determination of villagers and women shook everyone– from the district administration to the Chief Minister. Looking at the determination and objection of the villagers against the construction of liquor factory, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik ordered the stoppage of tree cutting in the forest [6]. Women in rural areas are more linked with natural resource use and conservation than men. Their traditional gender roles bring them in daily contact with natural resources such as land, water, forest and wildlife. They have to use these resources because they are often poor and their livelihood most depends on these resources. So, role of women in natural resource management should be recognized at local and global level and purposeful planning, empowerment policies are required the most in present contexts .As of now, about 1,000 trees have been lost and no new plantation has started yet and the villagers are apprehensive that some other project may return to their village unless the land is re-converted. Hence, the battle is still on. The issue might have lost the media limelight, but the villagers are not going to give up so easily. “I was scared then. Now, I am brave. We are ready to fight till the matter is fully resolved. We have only one demand: give us our forest back,” says Subhadra as she and other villagers painfully look at the logs lying in Jhinkargadi forest as reported by Pal (2019) [13]. Lastly, as stated by Mitra (2018) [11] the news of the scrapped project should give the neighbouring states of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh some cause for hope in their ongoing environmental movements and associated struggles against mining, energy and industrial projects in forest lands.

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