

WOMEN AS VANGUARD OF ENVIRONMENT: A STUDY OF JAMUNA TUDU

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Abstract:

Popularised in the early 1970s, discourse on the promotion and the protection of the environment, and the safeguard of mother earth is still a matter of serious concern for humanity. Throughout the world, politics of economic dominance and the struggle for power among nations are entangled with issues of environmental protection. Nations are withdrawing from acting on their commitment to environmental protection due to their self-interest. Hence, the objectives of the international community adopted in various conferences and conventions to restrict global average temperature well below 2°C (preferably to 1.5°C) above pre-industrial levels look like a distant dream. In the midst of such a crisis, the role of women in the promotion and protection of environment is worth mentioning. Numbers of conventions including the Beijing Platform for Action noted the role of women in sustainable development patterns and the need for participation in environmental decision makings. Agenda 21 (adopted in UNCED, 1992), emphasized global action for women towards sustainable development. This paper tries to study the involvement of women in the promotion and protection of the environment and thereby safeguarding mother earth. This paper also explores the efforts of Padma Shri Jamuna Tudu, popularly known as Lady Tarzan, for the protection of environment in the state of Jharkhand.

Keywords: Environment, Sustainable Development, women, Jamuna Tudu

Introduction:

At this 21st century, protection of mother earth, climate change are major concern for humanity. Countries of the world united at different platform to discuss about this issue. The awareness raised by Rachael Carson's book 'Silent Spring' and Stockholm Conference 1972 and then followed by lots of conferences. These conferences clear the fact that human and environment are interrelated,

therefore environmental degradation impact human beings. As per study, women are the worst sufferer of environment degradation as traditional sexual division of labour make women more connected with nature. Gradually lots of feminist started linking women and environment, which led to development of a new branch of study, i.e. Ecofeminism. Bringing together feminism and environment, ecofeminism argues that domination of women and degradation of environment are consequence of patriarchy and capitalism. There are lots of conferences which emphasis on role of women in protection of environment. Beijing Platform for Action noted the role of women in sustainable development pattern and Agenda21 also said about this. Beijing platform for action also said about women participation in environmental decision making. It mentions about ‘gender mainstreaming’ which means making sure that right of both men and women are visible in all policies (Buckingham). (Buckingham)

Among lots of women protector in India, Jamuna Tudu was an exemplary one. She was known as Lady Tarzen and being felicitated by Padma Shri Award in 2019 by the government of India. She worked for the protection and expansion of forest areas in the state of Jharkand. She created Van Suraksha Samiti with her village women and worked tirelessly for environmental protection. Before being awarded Padma Shri, people know very little about her. But now she is a very well-known figure (Girota). This paper examines the involvement of women in the promotion and protection of the environment. It also explores the efforts of Padma Shri Jamuna Tudu for the protection of environment in the state of Jharkhand. Data for the present study is collected from secondary sources. It includes books, journals, newspapers, and youtube videos.

Linking Women with Environment:

Women and environment are connected and this connection is explained by lots of thinkers, such as – Sherry B. Ortner, Susan Griffin, Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies etc. The branch of study emphasis on this relationship of women with environment is known as Ecofeminism. Women and nature both are feminine and similar in their notion of fertility. Both women and nature shares a subordinate and instrumental relationship to men, face same attitude and pattern of male domination. Ecofeminism draws a parallel between environmental degradation and oppression of women. Ecofeminism claim that patriarchal structure of society justify their dominance through categorical or dualistic hierarchies – heaven over earth, mind over body, male over female, culture over nature etc (Buckingham).

In sexual division of labour, women are given work confined to private sphere include- cooking, cleaning, taking care of children etc. In most of the places women go to forest for wood and collect fruit and vegetable, depend on river for all household works etc. They are connected with nature for each and every work and therefore they also the worst sufferer of environmental degradation. Some female writer wrote about this connection in their writings. Sherry B. Ortner wrote the book ‘Is Female to Men as Nature is to Culture?’ In this book she said nature is identified as having female attributes, culture is masculinist. And women are subordinate to men and in the same way nature is subordinate to culture. She believed because of women’s involvement with nature and reproduction relation, she is seen as part of nature than men. She believed women subordination

is the result of human mindset that human culture is superior to nature. As women symbolizes with nature and men with culture, thus women subordinate to men (Ortner).

Then another renowned feminist Vandana Shiva considered women as protector of biodiversity. Shiva in her article, 'Women's indigenous knowledge and biodiversity conservation', said that marginalisation of women and biodiversity destruction go hand in hand. Diversity is the principal of women's work and knowledge. While modern science and technology bring monoculture in agricultural system, but women's indigenous knowledge protect diversity. Women knowledge has been mainstay of indigenous dairy industry. In forestry women knowledge is crucial to use of biomass for feed and fertilizer. Women use biological source of feed, fertilizer, fuel and fiber etc. (Shiva) Vandana Shiva argued the modern development system or capitalist mode of production destroy women's indigenous knowledge which is sustainable to environment. Shiva calls for 'revival of other', bring the concept of 'sakti', 'prakriti', 'purusha prakriti', 'ardha nareshwar' etc. She called all this feminine principle and focuses on use of this principles (Rao).

Now world community also emphasizes on women's role in the protection of the environment. Beijing Platform for Action is an important one. It emphasises on women's role in environmental decision making. The conference suggests to emphasis on women's active participation as decision makers, planners, managers, scientists etc. The conference suggests women participation in implementation of policies and programmes for natural resource management, environment protection and conservation. Earlier gender question was neglected while formulating any policies and programme for sustainable development. But Beijing platform of action talks about integrating gender concern and take measures to give women equal access to and full participation in power structure and decision making (Bringing Beijing Home: The Platform for Action and You). After that, Agenda21 also dealt with global action for women towards sustainable development. Agenda21 is result of UN Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, also known as Earth Summit. Agenda21 is an action plan of UN to achieve sustainable development. Agenda 21 suggest government to take measures to increase women's participation in decision making, management, development and implementation of policies and programmes for sustainable development. It suggests to eliminate illiteracy among females and suggest to reduce workload of women in home so that they can actively participate in outside activities. Government should empower women's non- governmental organizations, bureau etc. in emphasising capacity building for sustainable development. Agenda 21 covered lots of issues starting from providing equal employment opportunity to women, give equal access to credit, develop rural banking for women, emphasizing crucial role of women to encourage investment in environment friendly sound activities etc. (Chapter 24: Global action for women towards sustainable and equitable development). Then the 26th session of Conference of parties (COP26) also said that women need more space at the climate table. It focused on the idea that women are more connected to nature and most affected by environmental degradation. So, women's opinion in decision making relating to climate issue, environment is very important.

In 2002, there was another summit in Johannesburg which confirmed gender perspective and gender mainstreaming in sustainable development effort. In 2005, UNEP adopted decision to mainstreaming gender perspective in environmental policies and programme. UNEP also organised first Global Women's Assembly on the Environment: Women as the Voice of Environment in 2004 in Nairobi, Kenya. It reaffirmed bringing women issue at the centre of global environment effort. In many countries, government carried out technical assistance activities for women including promotion of alternative fuel to firewood. Egypt trained women to use biogas in cooking. In India also, government introduced Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana on 1st May 2016. Under the scheme, government ensured distribution of 50 million LPG connections to women of below poverty line. The objective of the scheme is to provide clean cooking fuel to poor women to use in household. El Salvador's Gender Policy Declaration, South Africa's 1997 Water Service Act, Uganda's 1997 National Water Policy, Zambia's 2000 Mainstreaming Gender in Water and Sanitation Strategy etc. are some examples of the effort at national level (Women and Environment, 2012).

Progress has been made on recognition of women as potential partner of environmental protection since the awarding of 2004 Nobel Peace Prize to Wangari Maathai, founder of Green Belt Movement. Network of Women Ministers of the Environment is created with 22 female environment ministers and 28 women leaders of environmental NGOs. It emphasises women's capacity to bring new approach, new ideas in environmental decision making. There are some cases of women participation in water resource management. For example, in Nepal, women led team manages water supply and sanitation programme. We need to ensure women's participation in decision making at all levels. But they are under-represented due to many reasons such as illiteracy, lack of awareness, lack of training, limited access to natural resources etc. These limitations should be eradicated and government and world community should take some steps like – strengthen rural poor women's organisation, capacity building to create enabling environment, apply gender approach in decision making etc. (Women and Environment, 2012).

Throughout the world, women are working for the promotion and protection of mother earth since generations. Marjory Stoneman Douglas, Margaret Thomas Murie, Marine biologist Rachel Carson, Oceanographer and Marine biologist Sylvia Earle, Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg and Wangari Mathai of Kenya are few notable environmentalists among many. In India, the name of Siverine Swer, Vandana Shiva, Tulsi Gowda, Sunita Narain, Sumaira Abdulali, Medha Patker, Arundhoti Roy, and Jamuna Tudu may be noted. This paper explores the efforts made by Jamuna Tudu for the promotion and protection of environment.

Jamuna Tudu- An Environmentalist:

Jamuna Tudu is a well-known figure in Jharkand today. Because of her enormous contribution towards environmental promotion and protection, she was conferred with Padmashri in 2019.

Born in a farmer's family of Orissa in 1980 and brought up in an environment where nature was loved and respected, Jamuna Tudu was a person of bold and straightforward nature (Padma Shri

Jamuna Tudu: Interview-5). They had to work very hard for the survival of the family. Inspired by her father's love for nature, Jamuna Tudu and her siblings planted trees in their farm (Jamuna Tudu-Interview-1). In fact, they grew helping their father in carrying and planting saplings (The Hindu-09 June 2018). In 1998, Jamuna got married to Mansingh Tudu of Jharkhand. Going there, she came to know that Muturkham forest which was known for precious Sal tree are destroyed illegally by timber smugglers and mafias without any regards for existing forest laws and tribal traditions that prohibits cutting of tree (Girotra). One day, when she accompanied her in-laws in forest for gathering of firewood, she visualised the shrinking of forest and felt the need of ending deforestation by illegal means. She tried to find a solution to this problem of deforestation and tried to convince village women to fight against those smugglers and mafias. She tried to convince them some of whom had completed primary schooling and never stood even for themselves. Initially, they could not be convinced. They assumed that it will create enmity with their male counterpart in the village and may have to fight them (Puri). However, after her repeated attempts, they agreed to join Jamuna to fight against the mafias (Girotra). They founded Van Suraksha Samiti. Initially, they were few in numbers. But the numbers increased gradually. Even the men folk participated in their efforts.

Under the leadership of Jamuna Tudu, Vanraksha Samiti fought against the forest mafias who were cutting the precious sal trees and destroying the forest. They visit the forest very frequently and acted as vanguard of the forest. In doing so, they also had to fight against left wing extremists as the area was influenced by them. Armed with sticks, arrows and bows and accompanied by dogs they fought against those mafias to save the forest. They lodged FIR against many illegal smugglers and few of them were sent to jail (The Hindu-09 June 2018). Their fight became more difficult because the nexus between the forest mafias and the government forest officials. Despite those hindrance and hurdles, under her leadership Van Suraksha Samiti could save 50 hectares of forest in the Muturkham village in Singhbhum district of Jharkhand.

In the initial stage of her fight for promotion and protection of forest she had to face many hurdles. She said that she nearly paid with her life to keep the forest alive (The Hindu-09 June 2018). In fact, she escaped some of the deadliest attacks by forest mafias. In 2004, when she was engaging in the expansion of her efforts of forest protection in the nearby areas, her family was threatened. At 1.30 AM at night, they were surrounded. Her husband was handcuffed. They were warned that they must stop creating awareness on forest protection in the areas which will only save their life. At that night, all their utensils were taken away by them and they were released at the end (Lady Tarzan/Padma Shri Tudu/ Earth & Energy Ep 3). Similarly in 2008, another brutal attack was conspired against them. Tudu along with her husband went to a Railway Station, from where fire woods were transported illegally to other parts of the region. After discussion with the Station Master while they were returning home, they were brutally attacked with sharp stones. Her husband badly injured. But she did not stop. She rather, expanded her Samiti in nearby villages and worked for the protection of forest areas. In her leadership, several initiatives are organised to bring awareness on protection of forest and living in harmony with forest. Because of her

recognition by the Government and non-government institutions and her success, people gradually started to believe Tudu and supported in her efforts. Forest officials who were hand in glove with the smugglers now help Tudu. Today, more than 300 villages have their own Van Suraksha Samiti with 15-20 members (Saini). They celebrate Raksha Bandhan and Bhai Dhooj to create close bonding between local people and the forest (News 18 Urdu, 27 January 2019). They tie Rakhi to the trees and consider them as their brothers. On birth of every girl child and their marriage they plan trees.

Apart from conservation of forest, Jamuna Tudu also worked for the welfare of the people in the region who were badly affected during Covid-19 induced lockdown. She approached Draupadi Murmu, President of Indi (the then Governor of Jharkhand) to help people of the locality who were trapped in lockdown. She was respondent quickly. She spent whole of her Award Money (Padma Shri) in helping the people who became jobless as a result of pandemic. She was immensely helped by members of her Van Suraksha Samiti and owners of enterprises particularly the rice mill owners in helping the people of more than hundred villages who were in crisis during the pandemic (Saini).

Concluding Remarks:

This is the fact that women share a closer connection to nature than men because of the division of labour on the basis of sex. They engage in the gathering of firewood, fruit, and vegetables from the forest. For their daily livelihood, they largely depend on rivers and forest products and therefore, have a deeper understanding of nature. This deep understanding of nature has to be connected to the efforts of environmental protection. Various international conferences in recent decades also suggested greater involvement of women in the promotion and protection of the environment and giving women equal access to decision making. Efforts of Jamuna Tudu justify the claims of those conferences that identified women as potential saviours of mother earth.

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