

## **WOMEN AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*The almighty has blessed humans with the power of imagination. So let's imagine a world without trees. It's scary. Now let's imagine a world without women. It's scarier. If we ponder over it then we would realise that if our imagination would turn into reality life would become our worst nightmare. We humans have the capability to think rationally, yet we do not use our thinking abilities to understand the complexity of the situation. The beautiful truth of life is that a man owes his every breath to a mother. He is indebted to the woman who gave him the life he claims to be his. He is accountable to the mother land for his very own existence. Yet the reality of life is miles away from our imagination. Despite being in debts a man is the one who rules the world. He not only lacks gratitude for both the nature and women but also exploits these precious gifts of the almighty. Men live in a world which they consider what was meant only for their existence. They fail to understand that their existence depends on their opposite sex whom they prefer to keep under their thumb. They fail to realize that the land that holds them upright is their mother land which blesses them with the gift of life. They forget that they are merely an element of the nature whose journey is going to end up getting buried into the mother land. They are the offenders yet they stand strong with their heads held high. The question now arises that who is at actual fault, the one who commits the crime or the one who bears the crime and forgives!*

*This paper brings forward the idea of the oppression faced by women and nature and concentrates on how women and nature share a vital connection. This paper throws light on the exploitation of the mother land and women by the opposite sex and enlightens how women and nature are intertwined.*

**Keywords:** *Environment, fashion, style, sustainability*

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

**What would you do if someday you wake up to a world deprived of women?**

**What would you do if you found out that all the trees have vanished from your surroundings?**

**What would you do if you realise that the only source of water left on the planet is your teary eye?**

I am pretty sure all these questions would have left you wondering on how life would be without trees and the sources of water. Now you must be in deep thoughts on how would be your life if u did not have your mother by your side. Imagine a situation where you i.e. the men wake up to a rising sun shining bright though the cloudy night, it seems to be a beautiful morning. What if you get out of your cosy bed only to realise that your bed tea is missing and there is no female member in your house. You then walk out of the comforts of your house, which was only a home when the women of your house embellished it with their beauty, and you realise that this world has no feminine existence. Didn't such a great imagination terrify you enough to realize how disastrous would be life without nature and women?

Nature is almighty's most beautiful gift to mankind. There is so very much beauty all around us to see, touch, and hear. Nature is so miraculous because it is always changing. No matter how many times you look at something, it is always different. Nature can set a sky aflame at sunset or magically transform a familiar landscape into a snow-white wonderland. It can paint a rainbow in the sky, paint beautiful autumn colours on trees, or paint a clump of daffodils in the grass with glow of soft sunlight. When we wake and see a sunrise, when we walk and feel a breeze, when we gaze at the mountains and the splendour of the seas, when we see the earth renew its beauty at each season of the year, and when the stars shine at night, we should be so very thankful to the Lord for giving us all these wonderful and miraculous things. Learning to become more aware of nature can truly have a good effect on our lives in the way we look at things and in the way we feel about ourselves.

Nature plays a very vital role in our life. It not only makes life beautiful and worth living but is also an excellent teacher who teaches us some of the best lessons of life. The rising sun brings in the spirit to rise from the entire crisis and to shine bright to enlighten the world. The setting sun promises to come back again after a dark night with a new positive energy. The dark night, gloomy yet full of the most shining stars inspires us to be the bright light in a dusky night. The ever gorgeous moon with scars on it implies that scars do not deplete the beauty that you possess. The huge mountains facing the toughest storms give us the strength to stand with the heads held high even in the worst situations. When a bud blossoms into a flower, new hope will always come to us. Nature is truly an intrinsic part of our lives.

If nature is almighty's most beautiful gift to mankind, women are the most adorable gift of nature to mankind. It is often said that God could not be everywhere so he created mothers. Women are the angels that have landed on earth to make the world worth living for men. They are the messengers of god whose each prayer has only blessings and wishes for her loved ones. She is the idol of selflessness. The pivotal role of being a mother is still the divine mission assigned to women alone. From a classic poem written by William Ross Wallace entitled 'What Rules the World', he said that the hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world. It illustrates the influence a mother plays to her child and in the long run to the society; that as a mother strives to nurture and teach a child, she explicitly

makes the world a much better place. Women are actually given an opportunity and a privilege by God to be His partner in giving life to another human being.

For every preacher, president, volunteer worker, employee, fashionista, technician, community worker, doctor, caregiver among others, there is a mother behind them who fostered her child to reach his/her full potential.

## **THE LINK BETWEEN WOMEN AND NATURE:**

Women are connected to the nature in unique ways. Women and nature are certainly the best thing ever happened to mankind. They are beautiful just the way they are. They share a beautiful bond which has been explored to a certain extent.

When we say that women and the nature are interconnected, the first question that arises is what is the link between women and nature?

### **1. The feminine connection:**

Women and nature share a deep feminine connection. They are strong yet beautiful. They are both the creators of life. They are vital for the maintenance of life. They are traditionally the custodians of nature. Women are connected to every element of the nature in a different way.

- **Women and Forest:**

Women are like the enormous trees of a dense forest that provide you shelter throughout their life. They embrace you with their love to comfort you. Women have been connected to the forests since primitive age. They are the ones who have always shouldered the responsibilities of their families. They put life to their houses of wood. They are the roots of the families who shower their branches with the nutrition of love, care and nurture. Women are involved into the household chores since the Vedic age. It has been a part of their life to collect wood from the forests to feed their family. In developing countries, women have a direct dependence on trees and forests for their basic subsistence. Research suggests that trees and forests are more important to rural women's livelihoods than to those of men. In Madagascar poor women in one community earned 37% of their income from forest products, compared to 22% earned by men. In Andhra Pradesh, 77% of women's income in some areas was derived from forests.

- **Women and Water:**

Women are like the flowing water of the rivers that find their way even through the toughest paths. They are like the deep oceans that are full of immense love and care. They are like water that reflects the beauty of life. Indian cinema has always portrayed rural women standing in long queues waiting for hours to

collect water for their household. They have been depicted walking miles barefoot and carrying pots of water on their heads for long hours. Women have always been responsible for fulfilling the water requirements of the household no matter how tough it would be for them. In Africa and Asia, girls and children walk an average of 3.7 miles a day just to fetch water. Across India as a whole, it's estimated that women spend 150 million work days every year fetching and carrying, equivalent to a national loss of income of 10 billion rupees – this is \$160 million USD . On average, globally, women and children spend 200 million hours every day collecting water. As this task is so time consuming, they are often unable to finish their education, focus on domestic duties and find other job opportunities. Having access to clean, nearby water sources empowers women to improve their futures and to bring their families and communities out of poverty.

- **Women and farming:**

Women are the food producers of the world in true sense. The responsibility of feeding the family is always shouldered by the women of the house. Women in India are major producers of food in terms of value, volume and number of hours worked. Nearly 63 percent of all economically active men are engaged in agriculture as compared to 78 per cent of women. Almost 50 percent of rural female workers are classified as agricultural laborers and 37% as cultivators. About 70 percent of farm work was performed by women. It is observed that women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields including, main crop production, live-stock production, horticulture, post-harvesting operations, agro/social forestry, fishing etc.; it is a fact long taken for granted but ignored since ages.

## **2. Objectification:**

In this world where people are only full of selfish desires, women and nature are merely treated as objects. They are those objects which are only used for fulfilling one's personal pleasure. They are considered as goods and chattels. They are treated as objects of self-gratification. Since ages man has been admiring the beauty of the moon. He has been going all gaga over the beauty of his opposite sex. He has always been attracted to the outer beauty of the feminine. He is least concerned with the inner beauty of his counterpart. If a woman is beautiful, she is adorned and admired. If she is not beautiful, she is disregarded and disdained. So is the case with nature. Men treat the elements of nature as objects for their benefit. They cut down forests to make magnificent buildings of the precious wood. They make the land barren to own it. They obstruct the path of the rivers to make path for their development. Man has been playing with nature ever since his existence.

## **3. Oppression and exploitation:**

## **“Men create the demand; Women and Nature are the supply”**

Human beings live in the realm of nature, they are constantly surrounded by it and interact with it. Man is constantly aware of the influence of nature in the form of the air he breathes, the water he drinks, the food he eats, and the flow of energy and information.

Women in ancient India were held in high respect. With the course of time, the status of woman got lowered. Muscle and money power started dominating the societies. And as men fought the wars and ran the ventures of industrial production, they started considering themselves superior to woman. The history of suppression of women in India is very long. Indian women “have suffered and are suffering discrimination in silence. Self-sacrifice and self-denial are their nobility and fortitude and yet they have been subjected to all inequities, inequality and discrimination.

Though the Indian constitution provides equality of status and of opportunity to women, discrimination is persisting in one form or the other. Discrimination against women continues to exist even today as it is so deep-rooted in the traditions of Indian society. The root cause for the discrimination of women is that most women are ignorant of their rights and the position of equality assured to them under the Indian constitution and legal system. Enlightened women should fight to bring awakening in other women regarding their rights by bringing awareness about their status in society as they constitute half of the Indian population.

After the development of science and technology, the practice of female foeticide on a large scale also started. This eventually led to a slump in the female sex ratio. According to the census of 2001, the sex ratio in India is 927 females to 1,000 males. Dowry has become widespread and the birth of a girl child became inauspicious. In several parts of India, women are seen as an economic liability, even with the contribution of women in numerous ways to our economy and society. Early marriages, rape, molestation, sexual harassment, forced prostitution, eve teasing, etc. are a common issue today. The crime rate against women is mounting at a startling rate.

Primitive man used the readily available natural resources only to sustain life i.e. only to satisfy his basic needs for air, water, food and shelter. However, with the dawn of industrial revolution, man started utilising his ability to gather resources from beyond his immediate surroundings and processed these resources into different versatile forms in order to satisfy acquired needs i.e. other needs beyond those associated with survival.

In the quest of meeting these acquired needs man over-exploited the natural resources with total disregard to the incalculable harm being caused. Increasing human population is fast depleting the natural resources due to over-exploitation and is causing environmental imbalance leading to disastrous consequences.

## Ecological movements initiated by women:

### 1. Chipko movement

One of the first environmentalist movement which was inspired by women was the chipko movement (Women tree-huggers in India). "Its name comes from a Hindi word meaning "to stick" (as in glue). The movement was an act of defiance against the state government's permission given to a corporation for commercial logging. Women of the villages resisted, embracing trees to prevent their felling to safeguard their lifestyles which were dependent on the forests. ." The women embracing the trees did not tag their action as feminist activism; however, as a movement that demonstrated resistance against oppression."

### 2. Green Belt movement

Another movement, which is one of the biggest in women and environmental history, is the Green Belt movement. 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, 30 million trees had been planted by participants in the Green Belt movement on public and private lands.

### 3. Navdanya Movement

Navdanya also known as the 'Nine Seeds Movement' seeks to empower local Indian farmers to move away from growing any genetically modified organisms (GMOs) on their land and return to organic, chemical-free practices. This movement has reached over 5,000,000 Indian farmers and created over 65 seed banks around India.

### 4. Kenyan land takeover

In Kenya, starting in the mid-1980s, women protested against the elites and big foreign corporations who were coercing and controlling the production of the land. Rather than allowing food to be grown for survival, women were pressured by both their husbands and the government to cultivate coffee for foreign profit. Protests continued and gained strength over the next couple of decades. The protests eventually ended in a Kenyan power shift enforcing democratic national elections which resulted in redistribution of land possible

**TABLE: International affirmations of women's rights in environment and development**

1945	The United Nations Charter reaffirms "the equal rights of women and men" in its preamble. Article 55 c states: "The United Nations shall promote universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for
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	all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion” ( <a href="http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter">www.un.org/aboutun/charter</a> ).
1947	Establishment of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women ( <a href="http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw">www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw</a> ).
1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” ( <a href="http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html">www.un.org/Overview/rights.html</a> ).
1975	First United Nations World Conference on Women and associated NGO Forum in Mexico City; start of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace
1979	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) becomes the first international bill of women’s rights. It obliges signatory Governments to take action to promote and protect the rights of women. All countries that have ratified CEDAW (171 as of March 2003) must report on specific measures they have taken to advance the status of women. The Optional Protocol to CEDAW, created in 1999, enables women victims of gender discrimination to submit complaints for review ( <a href="http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw">www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw</a> ).
1985	The United Nations Third World Conference on Women and associated NGO Forum in Nairobi reviews and appraises the achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women. It produces the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, which recognize women’s role in environmental conservation and management ( <a href="http://www.un.org/womenwatch/confer/nfls.htm">www.un.org/womenwatch/confer/nfls.htm</a> ). At the Third World Conference, UNEP organizes a special event on women and the environment and nominates senior women advisers on sustainable development. The Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI) holds a series of workshops on women, environment and development at the NGO Forum.
1990	The World Conference on Education: Education for All takes place in Jomtien, Thailand and commits Governments to ensuring access to, and to improve the quality of, education for girls and women, and to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation ( <a href="http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed_for_all/background/world_conference_jomtien.shtml">www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed_for_all/background/world_conference_jomtien.shtml</a> )
1991	The WorldWIDE (World Women in Environment and Development) Global Assembly on Women and the Environment: Partners in Life meets in Miami, Florida, United States of America and presents 218 success stories ( <a href="http://www.womenenvironment.org/publ51.asp">www.womenenvironment.org/publ51.asp</a> ). Organized by WEDO, the First Women’s World Congress for a Healthy Planet, also in Miami, develops the Women’s Action Agenda 21 ( <a href="http://www.wedo.org/sus_dev/section1.htm">www.wedo.org/sus_dev/section1.htm</a> and

	<p><b><a href="http://www.iisd.org/women/about3.htm">www.iisd.org/women/about3.htm</a></b>.  In Geneva, the secretariat for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development holds the symposium Women and Children First: The Impact of Poverty and Environmental Degradation on Women and Children (Steady, 1993).</p>
1992	<p>The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development produces the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21, as well as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. The meeting recognizes women as a “major group” in sustainable development and makes specific provisions to advance their position. These include chapter 24 of Agenda 21, entitled “Global Action for Women towards Sustainable Development”, along with 145 other references. Rio Principle 20 reads: “Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential in achieving sustainable development”. At the NGO Forum that runs concurrently, the women’s tent, Planeta Fêmea, attracts much attention (<b><a href="http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/UNCED_Docs.htm">http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/UNCED_Docs.htm</a></b>).</p>
1993	<p>The World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna clearly acknowledges that women’s rights are human rights and that the human rights of women are an inalienable part of universal human rights (<b><a href="http://www.unhchr.ch/women">www.unhchr.ch/women</a></b>).</p>
1994	<p>The International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo takes major steps forward on women’s and girls’ rights to control their lives and obtain equal status with men, including in the areas of reproduction and family planning. The Programme of Action affirms that women’s empowerment, autonomy, equality and equity are important ends in themselves as well as essential for sustainable development. It also defines reproductive rights and applies principles to population policies and programmes. Calls on Governments to make sexual and reproductive health care available to all (women, men and adolescents) by 2015 (<b><a href="http://www.un.org/popin/icpd2.htm">www.un.org/popin/icpd2.htm</a></b>).</p>
1995	<p>The World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen calls for the eradication of poverty and the promotion of social justice and women’s rights (<b><a href="http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/wssd/index.html">www.un.org/esa/socdev/wssd/index.html</a></b>).</p> <p>The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and the affiliated NGO Forum in Huairou provide an opportunity to consolidate decisions already made and bring them forward into the Beijing Platform for Action. It offers a road map for achieving gender equality</p>



	<p>in 12 key areas: poverty, education and training, health, violence, armed conflict, the economy, decision-making, institutional mechanisms, human rights, the media, the environment and the girl child (United Nations, 1996). Section K, on women and the environment, asserts that “women have an essential role to play in the development of sustainable and ecologically sound consumption and production patterns and approaches to natural resource management” (<b>paragraph 246; <a href="http://www.un.org/womenwatch/confer/beijing/reports">www.un.org/womenwatch/confer/beijing/reports</a></b>).</p>
2000	<p>Beijing+5: Beijing and Beyond convenes in New York and recognizes several emerging critical issues for women and girls, including work-related rights, gender-based violence, reproductive and sexual rights, education and social security, and access to productive resources (<b>DAW, 2001; <a href="http://www.un.org/womenwatch/confer/beijing5/">www.un.org/womenwatch/confer/beijing5/</a></b>).</p> <p>At the Millennium Summit in New York, all 189 United Nations Member States commit themselves to establishing a better, healthier and more just world by 2015. The Millennium Declaration promises “to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable”. The Declaration’s eight Millennium Development Goals include Goal 1, eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; Goal 3, promote gender equality and empower women; and Goal 7, ensure environmental sustainability (<b><a href="http://www.un.org/millennium/">www.un.org/millennium/</a></b>).</p> <p>Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), on women, peace and security, recognizes the impact of war on women and recommends improving women’s protection during conflicts as well as women’s leadership in peace-building and reconstruction (<b><a href="http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/2000/sc2000.htm">http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/2000/sc2000.htm</a></b>).</p>
2001	<p>The United Nations General Assembly special session on HIV/AIDS in New York adopts targets to promote girls’ and women’s empowerment as fundamental elements in the reduction of the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS (<b><a href="http://www.unaids.org/Unaids/EN/events/un+special+session+on+hiv_aids.asp">www.unaids.org/Unaids/EN/events/un+special+session+on+hiv_aids.asp</a></b>).</p>
2002	<p>The World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg issues the Johannesburg Declaration and Plan of Action. It confirms the need for gender analysis, gender specific data and gender mainstreaming in all sustainable development efforts, and the recognition of women’s land rights. The Declaration states: “We are committed to ensuring that women’s empowerment, emancipation and gender equality are integrated in all the activities</p>

	encompassed within Agenda 21, the Millennium Development Goals and the Plan of Implementation of the Summit” (WEDO, 2002; <a href="http://www.johannesburgsummit.org">www.johannesburgsummit.org</a> ).
2003	The eleventh session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development decides that “gender equality will be a cross-cutting issue in all forthcoming work up until 2015” ( <a href="http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd11/CSD11.htm">www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd11/CSD11.htm</a> ).  Sources: UNIFEM, 2002; UNDP, 2003; Hemmati and Seliger, 2001; Pietilä, 2002; WEDO, 2003

## CONCLUSION:

Sustainable development is the need of the hour. With the increasing exploitation of natural resources, the need to protect the environment has become extremely mandatory. If we continue to neglect the environment, there will come a day when all the natural resource would vanish from the planet Earth. We need to realize the importance of natural resources before the damages go beyond repair.

Women share a special bond with nature. Thus women should be involved in the protection of nature. Since women are reliable on the nature for the fulfilment of their basic needs, they can be the best protectors of nature. Also women are full of emotions. They are very sensitive towards nature and realize the threat to the environment. They tend to understand the necessity of protecting the natural resources for the future generation.

To make women capable of protecting the environment, it is necessary to empower the women. Only when women will have the power they would be able to protect the environment more efficiently and effectively.

As stated by Diane Reed, president of the Cree Society for Communication: ‘ Now the women are rising up. And when the women rise up from a nation, they are the strongest voice that can be heard and it’s a voice that cannot be silenced.’

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