

Fanon Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Grove Press, 1968, pp. 182.

Gaard Geeta, *Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature*, In, Gaard Geeta (Ed.) *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, Temple Press, Philadelphia, 1992, pp.2 ; See Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1948.

Chantal Elizabeth Wieckardt, Stasja Koot & Nadya Karimasari (2020): *Environmentality, green grabbing, and neoliberal conservation: The ambiguous role of ecotourism in the Green Life privatised nature reserve, Sumatra, Indonesia*, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, DOI: 10.1080/09669582.2020.1834564

Cynthia H. Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, pp. 44.

Devi, M. , *Douloti the bountiful*. In G. C. Spivak (Trans.), *Imaginary maps* New York, Routledge, 1995, pp. 19-93.

Meinig, D.W. (1979, first published 1976) “The beholding eye: ten versions of the same scene” in D.W. Meinig, J.B. Jackson et al (eds.) *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes* Oxford & New York, Oxford University Press.

Ortner, S. (1974) “Is Female to Male is to Culture?” in Rosaldo, M.Z. and L. Lamphere (eds.), *Women, Culture, and Society*. Stanford University Press, pp. 68-87.

Shiva, Vandana, *The Violence of the Green Revolution*, University Press of Kentucky, 1990; *Monocultures of the Mind*, Zed Books, 1993.

Sung Hee Yook, *Bonded Slavery and Gender in Mahasweta Devi’s “Douloti the Bountiful”*, *Asian Women*, March 2018, Vol. 34, No. 1, pp. 1-22, <https://doi.org/10.14431/aw.2018.03.34.1>.

Xaxa Virginius, *Introduction*, In *State, Society, and Tribes: Issues in Post-Colonial India*, Pearson Longman, 2008 pg. 4

Mohanty Chandra Talpade, *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*, *boundary 2*, Spring - Autumn, 1984, Vol. 12/13, Vol. 12, no. 3 - Vol. 13, no. 1, *On Humanism and the University I: The Discourse of Humanism* (Spring - Autumn, 1984), Duke University Press, pp. 333-358.

## BEYOND THE BINARY INTERSECTING GENDER AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

**Dr. Priyanka Sharma**

In recent years, there has been an increased emphasis on the convergence between gender and environment, particularly in the aftermath of the large-scale inequalities and injustices posited by the development process at various levels of the society, economy, polity as well as the environment. It has become increasingly clear that one of the grave challenges in front of humankind today are that of the ‘triple planetary crisis’ of climate change, nature loss and pollution affecting lives and livelihoods of different stakeholders. What becomes a reason of preponderance is that the gravity of such risks varies with the socio-economic, political and cultural situations in which a person or a community is situated. Although both men and women are affected by such risks and threats depending on the nature of their vulnerability and resilience, it has been widely accepted that women and children are at a greater risk of environmental degradation within the patriarchal system thereby increasing their vulnerabilities. Environmental issues are now reframed as issues of global justice and as such new alliances and associations are being sought to address such crisis in its entirety. This paper is an attempt to look into the linkages between gender and environmental justice and suggest measures for a more gendered response towards environmental justice.

### **Towards and understanding of environmental justice**

Extending notions of justice and fairness to the environment is a recent phenomenon that emerged primarily with the global environmental negotiations starting from the 1970s and 1980s. Growing awareness on environmental degradation and realisation of the fact that the dominant discourse on development with a linear projection of economic growth induced progress is unsustainable as well as the disproportionate impacts of such progress amongst different communities led to global commitments for regulation of use of resources and their distribution. Over the course of time, new inter-disciplinary fields of study like environmental politics, environmental economics, international environmental law etc gained preeminence dealing almost with the same question - How to secure the environment and save

the planet from the existential crisis of climate change, pollution and other forms of environmental degradation. While efforts were being made for combating pollution and protection of the environment, issues like that of people of color and low-income communities being exposed disproportionately to pollution and associated health risks and obstacles to economic prosperity were given little significance. Growing awareness of such racial environmental health disparities and mounting resistance by the affected people brought public attention to extending notions of justice to the environment. The term 'Environmental racism' was coined in the year 1982 by Benjamin Chavis, the then head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) at a protest held in the black town of Afton, North Carolina that emerged out of the criticisms made on the dumping of contaminated soil in the county having the highest concentration of blacks with a high poverty rate. Dumping of toxic wastes in community specific areas, particularly people of color and the poor was termed as no less than 'attempted genocide' (Parks and Roberts, 2006: 329). This gave birth to a political movement in America. Since then the term was expanded and broadened to Environmental Justice to include the unequal exposures of race, class, gender and ethnicity to environmental degradation. The concept of Environmental Justice thus grew out of community action and can be described as the intersection between environmental laws and regulations and civil rights laws and regulations, "simultaneously advancing environmental and public health and civil rights through a combined lens, focusing on socio-economic status along with race" (Ruhl and Ostar, 2016: 42-47). The United States environmental justice movement influenced the imagination of people worldwide having similar experiences and gradually environmental justice became a rallying point and a strategic part of the struggle for a clean and healthy environment. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defined Environmental Justice as the "fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies" (Ruhl and Ostar, 2016: 44). It sought that no one should be exposed to a disproportionate share of negative environmental impacts arising out of government or industrial policies and highlights the importance of public participation in environmental decision-making. Environmental Justice thus is concerned with the distribution of the benefits and burdens of environmental consequences equitably while striving to ensure environmental rule of law and full participation of all stakeholders.

### The UNDP approach to Environmental justice

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its Guidance Note (2022) *Promoting Environmental Justice: Securing our right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment* presents a detailed analysis of how to achieve environmental justice. It mentions that for the enjoyment of human rights and a right to dignified life, a healthy environment is essential. The right to a healthy and clean environment has been recognised internationally and nationally through various agreements and policies and is generally understood to include a set of procedural rights (access to information and participation on matters related to the environment etc.) and a set of substantive rights (clean air, water, healthy climate, non toxic environment etc). But the emerging global trends viz. over-exploitation of natural resources, pollution, increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters etc threaten to "reverse decades of development and exacerbate poverty" (Guidance Note, 2022: 4). The report calls attention towards the 'triple planetary crises of climate change, nature loss, and pollution' which is directly and indirectly impacting human rights globally, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable and marginalised sections of the society. It has shifted focus to the post Covid-19 period which has aggravated such inequalities exposing deep injustices and unfulfilled security and human rights. The UNDP's environmental justice strategy conceptualises environmental justice as:

- "promotion of justice and accountability in environmental matters;
- focus on the respect, protection and fulfillment of environmental rights; and
- promotion of the environmental rule of law." (Guidance Note, 2022: 6)

It seeks to achieve and promote environmental justice through a three-pronged approach:

- "Establishing enabling legal frameworks at national and international levels
- Strengthening people-centred and effective institutions
- Increasing access to justice and legal empowerment in environmental and climate change matters" (Guidance Note, 2022: 7).

Through such an approach, UNDP seeks to use the concept of environmental justice (including climate justice) as a guiding principle for promoting development within the planetary boundaries. The human rights-based approaches are given emphasis in the fulfillment of environmental rights with more importance being put on the institutions related to human rights so that they become accessible to all and are equipped to monitor and implement environmental laws. People are considered as the key players in the objective of ensuring environmental justice through greater participation, greater awareness of their rights, defending their rights and becoming active agents of policy change. Environmental justice is seen as the fair and equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens amongst different sections of the society regardless of their class, caste, gender or community identities. It entails the right of all individuals to effectively participate in the environmental decision-making process, including recognition of the traditional and indigenous knowledge systems and empowerment of the marginalised communities in creating sustainable solutions to pertinent challenges affecting the environment. The concept of Environmental Justice views protection of the environment and promotion of human development and human rights as inclusive and mutually reinforcing goals.

### **Gender and Environment: Intersecting struggle for justice**

The United Nation's Fourth Conference on Women held in Beijing in the year 1995 had made issues of women's rights crucial in development planning. It underlined the importance of the greater need and recognition of integrating gender in policy making. With respect to the environment, understanding the gender dimensions of environmental justice is crucial for promotion of inclusive and equitable environmental law, policies and practices. Gender and environmental justice are two inter-related concepts that highlight the need to address the differential impacts of environmental degradation on different genders and to ensure the participation of all irrespective of their genders in the decision-making process on environment. Who controls resources and determines rights over resources and the definition of a healthy environment remains at the heart of the gender and environment debate. Gender is an important factor because it intersects with various social, economic and cultural factors that determine how individuals and communities interact with the environment. Gender socialisation have made prominent different gender roles and responsibilities for men and women in relation to the environment having a direct bearing on their access to resources, exposure

to risks and participation in the legal and political matters. For instance, women are more vulnerable to environmental hazards like pollution, toxic waste and climate change due to their socio-economic status in the family and in the society with other gender identities like LGBTIQ+ and women with special needs, refugee women and others facing additional risks and obstacles in accessing environmental justice. Women also have limited access to land and resources limiting their ability to adapt to environmental change and mitigate environmental risks. Due to the limited access or absence of access to information and educational facilities, women are also at a more disadvantageous position to have knowledge about environmental risk management furthering their limit to adapt to change. It has been generally observed that traditional, customary and religious laws and practices often limit women's access and claim to land and other assets despite them playing a crucial role in the management of these assets. Rocheleau et al (1996) while looking into the gendered dimensions of environmental rights and responsibilities maintain that women's multiple roles as 'producers, reproducers and consumers' have required them to develop and maintain 'integrative' abilities to deal with the household, community and landscape which often brings them in conflict with the specialised branches of science leading to a separation of 'knowing and doing', of 'formal and informal knowledge' (Rocheleau et al. 1996: 8). While formal science relies heavily on fragmentation, specialisation, division of knowledge; feminists have argued for a more holistic and integrative approach to environmental issue. This is because the social positioning of men and women have often led to the gendered dimension of environmental rights of control and access of resources as well as responsibilities to procure and manage resources for the household and community. Apart from that, there is also the 'gender division of power to preserve, protect, change, construct, rehabilitate and restore environments and regulate the actions of others' (Rocheleau et al. 1996: 8).

There has been close intersections between climate change, livelihoods and violence against women with women and children being at more risks due to natural disasters. Following disasters, it is more likely that women and children will be subject to domestic violence and sexual abuse with risks of trafficking increasing manifold along with other health hazards. As per the United Nations Development Programme, women and children are 14 times more likely to bear the brunt of natural disasters than men. Girls are more likely to miss schools as they are needed back home to collect water and firewood and look after the care giving activities. They also become

vulnerable to other forms of malpractices such as domestic violence, child marriage, rape, sexual assault etc. and also become victim to male dominated institutions in the event of defending their rights. In the year 2020, around 331 environmental defenders were killed, including 44 women, 69 percent of whom were defending land rights, the rights of Indigenous peoples and environmental rights.<sup>1</sup> In 1991, during the cyclone disasters in Bangladesh, of the 140,000 people who died, 90% were women.<sup>2</sup> More than 70 % of the people who died in the 2004 Asian tsunami were women. Hurricane Katrina, which struck New Orleans, USA in 2005, predominantly affected African American women, one of the poorest and most marginalized community. After the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimated that 2 million women and girls of reproductive age had been affected by the crisis, including approximately 126,000 pregnant women.<sup>3</sup> Around 6.4 million people who are in need of humanitarian assistance following the floods and landslides in Pakistan in 2022, more than 1.6 million are women of childbearing age. UNFPA estimates that almost 650,000 pregnant women in the flood-affected areas require maternal health services to ensure a safe pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>4</sup> These statistical data corroborates the view of women being more affected by environmental risks and also being more vulnerable.

Women also represent a high percentage of poor communities being highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood, as well as for food security, particularly in rural areas. In the Near East, women contribute up to 50 per cent of the agricultural workforce. Women are mainly engaged in subsistence farming, particularly horticulture, poultry and raising small livestock for home consumption.<sup>5</sup> But their share in ownership of land and other assets does not account for the efforts they put in managing their households. Usually women do not have land rights,

have less political voice and lesser mobility due to cultural restrictions. Women's labour and resources often become invisible to the technocratic lens of the development planners. The gendered division of labour, rights and responsibilities have also changed over time with men being mostly drawn to 'cash crop production, local wage labour and the urban work force' while women are being increasingly made to be 'responsible for the use and maintenance of the rural landscapes and look after subsistence and commercial production along with much of the community and environmental 'maintenance' work' (Rocheleau, 1995: 9). Despite seemingly being responsible for the production of the subsistence economy and maintenance of the ecosystems, women are often obstructed by the restricted rights to use and access resources due to cultural barriers. All such existing vulnerabilities expose more challenges to women and reflect the crucial intersections between environment, gender and livelihood strategies.

## **GENDER - INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES: A PRAGMATIC APPROACH**

Environmental policies, mostly, do not offer a gender-responsive governance involving women as agents of change. The focus of the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW66) on "*achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes*" shares three key points on how gender equality is the key for climate justice:

- ▶ An enabling and gender sensitive legal framework is a prerequisite for women to enjoy their right to a healthy environment
- ▶ People-centered institutions are key to deliver gendered responses on climate justice
- ▶ Access to justice is a cornerstone in equipping women to uphold and enforce their rights<sup>6</sup>

Women's expertise and knowledge on resource use (developed over long periods of them being close to nature as a result of their socialisation

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.undp.org/blog/gender-equality-cornerstone-environmental-and-climate-justice> accessed on 05.03.2023

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.unisdr.org/files/48152\\_disasterandgenderstatistics.pdf](https://www.unisdr.org/files/48152_disasterandgenderstatistics.pdf) accessed on 05.03.2023

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/humanitarian-action/facts-and-figures> accessed on 06.03.2023

<sup>4</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/women-and-girls-bearing-brunt-pakistan-monsoon-floods> accessed on 06.03.2023

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/womenin-shadow-climate-change> accessed on 06.03.2023

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.undp.org/blog/gender-equality-cornerstone-environmental-and-climate-justice> accessed on 05.03.2023

process which posits women as the care-givers) can have multiple ramifications on formulation of environmental policies to adapt to changing environmental realities. Addressing gender-specific impacts of environmental degradation and climate change in areas of food security, water, agriculture, biodiversity, human rights, peace and security in mitigation and adaptation policies requires immediate attention. Some key points can be summarised as follows:

- a) **Gender-analysis:** Gender analysis is crucial in understanding the different ways in which women and men are impacted by environmental policies. It is important to identify how gender intersects with environmental policies affecting different groups of people. Gender analysis of financial mechanisms is also needed to ensure gender sensitive investments in programmes relating to adaptation and mitigation, technology transfer and capacity building in lines with the goals of Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- b) **Greater participation:** Women are often under-represented in the decision-making processes related to environmental policies. It is essential to involve women at all levels of decision-making, from community consultations to national policy discussions. Consultation and participation of women must be ensured and role of community and women groups must be strengthened.
- c) **Capacity-building:** Providing training and education for women can help build their capacity to engage in decision-making processes and to contribute to sustainable development. This could include training on sustainable agriculture practices, renewable energy, climate adaptation strategies and skill development programmes which will ensure their full participation in environmental policies.
- d) **Evaluation of policy impact:** Gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation of environmental policies is critical to understanding whether policies are having the intended impact on women and men. This process should be designed to ensure that woman's experiences and perspectives are wholly captured.

Through such pragmatic actions, governments should ensure greater participation and capacity building of women stakeholders in their national policies and action plans and make use of their knowledge and expertise,

including indigenous and traditional practices. Regarding indigenous knowledge systems, Gabriele Dietrich (1999: 94) argues that women's intimate knowledge of forestry, agriculture, water conservation, seeds, herbal medicine needs to be mobilised and used as against the monopoly of government planning, industrial vested interests and multinational corporations. Such skills can be easily devalued and destroyed by the onslaught of technological innovations leading to greater impoverishments and destruction of cultural identities. How to co-opt such skills in development policies is an urgent task. Women specially in rural areas and in the Third world countries are dependent on nature for the sustenance of themselves and their families and hence destruction of nature comes to be realised as destruction of women's means to sustenance itself which is described aptly as destruction of women's sources of 'staying alive' by Vandana Shiva. Shiva projects modern science and the resulting development process as 'reductionist' and 'masculinist' having the propensity to reduce diversity embedded in nature into homogenous properties. Such reductionism has been the cause of erosion of recognition of women's intimate knowledge about nature and also has been at the heart of the ecological crisis engulfing the world. In a response against the reductionist paradigm of the modern development process with its emphasis on mastery over nature, Shiva calls for a voice of the 'other' or the 'feminine principle' in which nature is viewed as 'Prakriti', an expression of Shakti symbolising the cosmic principle of creation of life through the Purusha-Prakriti (duality in unity) principle (Shiva 1988).

The relationship between environment and gender is complex and multifaceted. There is increasing recognition of the fact that there is disproportionate impact of environmental risks on different genders and women as a category is more vulnerable to climate change and other forms of environmental degradation. Feminists have also argued that mainstream environmental policies have excluded women's experiences and perspectives and hence there is a need for a more intersectional approach to recognize the ways in which gender, race and other social identities intersect with the environment.

## Conclusion

The convergence of the categories of environment, gender and development emerged within the context of rapid restructuring of economic, ecological, social and political policies both at the global and local levels. The concept of Environmental justice enables viewing the relationship between individuals

and the environment as a living relationship and in conjunction with the process of creation of life on earth which needs a holistic interpretation through an intersection of different parameters. It calls for an integrated approach to respond to the environmental and humanitarian crises through stemming up accessibility and rule of law, strengthening institutions and the governance system thereby contributing to policy change. In the context of environmental crisis, women are found to be more vulnerable than men as they constitute majority of the world's poor and are also more dependent on natural resources for their survival and also face socio-cultural and political barriers in their coping capabilities. But at the same time, women can also be active agents of change rather than being a passive vulnerable group through their intimate knowledge and expertise of natural resources. Therefore, it is imperative to identify the intersections and linkages between the two and correspond to gender-responsive strategies in relation to mitigation and adaptation strategies within the framework of SDGs.

## Reference

Dietrich, G. (1999). Women, Ecology and Culture in Menon, N. *Gender and Politics in India*, New Delhi: OUP

Guidance Note (2022). *Promoting Environmental Justice: Securing our right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment*, New York: UNDP, [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-06/Environmental % 20 justice -Guidance%20Note.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-06/Environmental%20justice-Guidance%20Note.pdf) accessed on 02.02.2023

<https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/women-and-girls-bearing-brunt-pakistan-monsoon-floods> accessed on 06.03.2023

<https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/women-and-girls-bearing-brunt-pakistan-monsoon-floods> accessed on 06.03.2023

[https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/70076/5011\\_Rocheleau \\_Gender \\_and \\_Environment.pdf?sequence=1](https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/70076/5011_Rocheleau_Gender_and_Environment.pdf?sequence=1) accessed on 07.03.2023

<https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/womenin-shadow-climate-change> accessed on 06.03.2023

<https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/womenin-shadow-climate-change> accessed on 06.03.2023

<https://www.undp.org/blog/gender-equality-cornerstone-environmental-and-climate-justice> accessed on 05.03.2023

<https://www.undp.org/blog/gender-equality-cornerstone-environmental-and-climate-justice> accessed on 05.03.2023

<https://www.undp.org/blog/gender-equality-cornerstone-environmental-and-climate-justice> accessed on 05.03.2023

[https://www.unisdr.org/files/48152\\_disasterandgenderstatistics.pdf](https://www.unisdr.org/files/48152_disasterandgenderstatistics.pdf) accessed on 05.03.2023

[https://www.unisdr.org/files/48152\\_disasterandgenderstatistics.pdf](https://www.unisdr.org/files/48152_disasterandgenderstatistics.pdf) accessed on 05.03.2023

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/humanitarian-action/facts-and-figures> accessed on 06.03.2023

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/humanitarian-action/facts-and-figures> accessed on 06.03.2023

Parks, Bradley C. and Roberts, J.T. (2006). Environmental and Ecological Justice in Betsill, M., Hochstetler, K. and Stevis, D. (ed.) *Palgrave advances in International Environmental Politics*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan

Rocheleau, D. (1995). *Gender and biodiversity : A feminist political ecology perspective*, IDS Bulletin, Vol. 26 No 1, [https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/9309/IDSB\\_26\\_1\\_10.1111-j.1759-5436.1995.mp26001002.x.pdf?sequence=1](https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/9309/IDSB_26_1_10.1111-j.1759-5436.1995.mp26001002.x.pdf?sequence=1) accessed on 07.03.2023

Rocheleau, D., Thomas, Slayter, B. and Wangari, E. (1996). Gender and Environment: A Feminist political ecology perspective in *Feminist Political Ecology: Global Issues and Local Experience*, London: Routledge,

Ruhl, S. and Ostar, J. (2016). Environmental Justice, GPSolo May/June, *Environmental Law*, American Bar Association, (pp. 42-47).

Shiva, V. (1988). *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival*, London :Zed Books.