

# NURTURING PRAKRITI (NATURE): THE ROLE OF INDIAN WOMEN IN ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

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## Abstract

*Prakriti, a Sanskrit word meaning nature, is also referred to as a Hindu goddess in Sanskrit scriptures. In various ancient scriptures and literature, there is a feminine personification of nature, establishing a close association between nature and women. Nature encompasses all animals, plants, and other elements that are not man-made. The connection between women and nature is evident in various aspects such as fertility and nurturing. Women have been closely tied to nature, dependent on it, and capable of identifying even the smallest changes in the environment. Their keen observations allow them to understand the long-term impacts of these changes, emphasizing their integral role in the preservation of nature. Since ancient times, women have played a vital role in nurturing nature, and this responsibility persists to the present day. Numerous rituals, customs, and traditions have evolved to protect the environment, with women actively participating in these practices. The paper sheds light on how women, through their daily activities, contribute to environmental conservation and showcases their dedication to safeguarding the natural world. This paper focuses on the significance of women's role in environmental conservation through their daily activities and concern for the same.*

**Keywords:** Prakriti, Ecofeminisms, Environmental Conservation

Since ancient times, women have played a vital role in nurturing nature, and this responsibility persists to the present day. Numerous rituals, customs, and traditions have evolved to protect the environment, with women actively participating in these practices. Women are closely related to nature since ancient era. Every religion and its customs and traditions are emerged on the basis of geographical and environmental conditions of that area. In India almost all the traditions are emerged to show the gratitude to the natural resources and eventually to conserve all the resources. Many of these rituals are performed by the women. Women are always considered as the caretaker of the family so as the nature. Nature and women have many similarities like feeder, caretaker, reproducer, etc. As a care taker of family women have close association with nature as all the house chores from cooking to sanitation is depending on natural resources. Since ancient times the daily activities of the women reflect how they are concern about environment and nature.

Women used to get up early in the morning and the first used to coat the wall of the hearth with soil which is considered as thermal insulator. Soil stopped spreading of heat and fire in the surroundings. Soil also used in many thermal insulator devices<sup>1</sup>. She brings the wood from the forest. She always chooses a dry or dead tree of which wood she used for cooking. She exactly knows which wood to be used for cooking purpose. Bamboo neither used for burning for religion purpose nor for cooking as it can emit poisonous gases after burning. Bamboo contains lead and other heavy metals like chromium, arsenic, cadmium, copper, nickel. Burning of bamboo produces Lead Oxide and other toxic oxides in gaseous form which are harmful if inhaled. So bamboo should not be burnt<sup>2</sup>.

Women can identify whether the seeds are fertile and which trees seeds can be used for cultivation. Tulsi Gowda is a female environmentalists still follows it and she is being awarded with Padmashri award<sup>3</sup>. Women are always keen about the fertility. The fertility ensure the sustainability of the species by producing next generation. Flowers are the main organ in plants reproductive system. Women are engage in collecting flowers for rituals, worship or decorations of the house. They never plucked flowers from the trees especially if that tree bears the seeds. The young buds are not allowed to pluck and the full bloomed flowers are only allowed to use for the worshiping. The flower tree which bears the seeds that tree flowers are always collected from the ground where all the flowers falls after the seed is ready. These small gesture shows how females were concerned about the trees and their next generation.

Women usually take care of the surroundings and the flora and fauna around them. They offer food to the birds who keeps the surrounding clean and eats the small insects and protect house from the pests entering in the house. The birds are also the carrier of seeds of trees which they spread through their excreta and ensure the next generation of plants. So birds are protects near the house by women. Women worship many plants like Tulsi, baniyaan tree, peepal Tree during various rituals. As these plants are provide oxygen and purify the air in

the surrounding<sup>4</sup>. The women are an important link between nature and mankind existence. Women understand the coexistence and take action to protect trees. They inculcate values in children with stories, rituals which groom the next generation as they don't required to take extra efforts for environmental conservation. These legacy helps to sustain environmental resources. From ancient time to the current era in every time zone there are n number of women who either protected or fight against destruction of environment. Many names are not even documented as environmental protectors. There were females like Gaura devi<sup>5</sup> from Uttarakhand who protest against cutting of forest. The women like Saalumarada Thimmakka<sup>6</sup> from Karnataka who planted over 8000 trees and still planting the trees. She is also known as tree women of India.

These women were actively involved in environmental conservation. Rahibai Popere from Maharashtra taken efforts to conserve wild varieties of seed and created a seed bank in her small mud house<sup>7</sup>. Many local farmers and adivasi communities had lost the local varieties of seeds. Rahibai also realised the harmful effects of food grown with pesticides and fertilizers and she started protecting and promoting growing local food crops and wild varieties. These women were illiterate but understood the importance of indigenous plants and tree and they started protecting them. Along with these females the women like Vandana shiva<sup>8</sup> who is social worker and physicist raised voice against green revolution which was using lots of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. She faught against the degradation of environment and monoculturing of agriculture activities. She has started with the research Institute where they preserve the seed bank through out India to protect the wild varieties of indigenous plants. The youngest environmentalists Licypriya Kangujam who is climate change activist from Manipur hardly 13 years old girl<sup>9</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

The women are very active and protecting and conservation of nature. From ancient times to recent technological eras there are n number of females who had contributed their life in protecting the nature and nurturing it. Many of them were never been to school or taken any formal education but still with their love for nature and deep understanding of the surrounding motivated them to create history. Women is a mother inculcating values in next generation who carry forward the legacy of the mother and if the mother has awareness about the nature and nurturing it next generation will follow the same. Indian women perform an important role of protector, nuturer and conservator in protecting the environment. s

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