

Environmental Awareness And Environmental Ethics Among Rural Women – A Study In Baridua Area Of Ri-Bhoi District, Meghalaya

Karabi Bhattacharyya

PQH School of Education, USTM

Abstract

Environment is the aggregate of all external conditions that affect the life and development of every living organism .But during the past few decades, various environmental problems pose a threat to environmental sustainability due to both natural and manmade hazards .So it is the need of the hour to create awareness among people towards environmental issues .In this context ,both men and women are equally responsible to understand the environmental consequences of our consumption and need to play a leadership role towards saving, protecting, conserving and enhancing the environment both at home and in the society individually and collectively. The present study was undertaken in the Baridua area situated in Ri-Bhoi District of Meghalaya to study the level of environmental awareness and environmental ethics among tribal and non-tribal rural women towards environmental health,hygiene ,sanitation, causes of environmental pollution and conservation of environment .Descriptive survey method was conducted on a sample of 68 rural women of the said area and the sample was selected by proportionate stratified random sampling technique .For data collection ,a self-developed questionnaire was used and the data analysis included tabulation and percentage .

Key word: Environmental Awareness, Environmental Ethics, Rural Women.

Introduction

In the 21st century, due to development of science and technology, industrial revolution, urbanization and emergence of modern living trends, environmental imbalance has become a great challenge for human survival. During the course of development of civilization human being is damaging the natural environment not for satisfaction of basic needs but for fulfilment of unlimited greed due to which the global environment with its finite resources is becoming a common concern for all people . Unfortunately human being seem to have forgotten that environment which is the source of life cannot be priced and is highly dynamic multidimensional and interdisciplinary concept which encompasses various elements concerning human settlement, air, land influencing all forms of life in one way or others.

Therefore there is an urgent need to create public awareness for environmental health, hygiene, conservation, protection. There can be no hope of finding viable solution to environmental crisis unless and until people become sensitized towards the environmental issues and problems. That is why now a day's environmental awareness and environmental ethics are key issues that are receiving attention at national and international level.

The term 'environment' etymologically means surroundings. The environment simply encompasses the atmosphere, eco system, water biodiversity, plant and animal life. The natural environment provides the basic condition without which humanity would not survive. Therefore the resilience of the community of life and the well being of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure water and clean air. Awareness to environment is a horizon sweeping word. Environmental awareness may be defined as to help the social groups and individuals to gain a variety of experience to acquire a basic understanding of environment and its associated problem.

In today's world, environmental crisis are salient facts. If we want to check the Environmental crisis we will have to transform our thinking and attitude that in turn, would transform our deeds, leading to a better environment and better future. Then our acts will follow what we think. This is called Environmental ethics. So, Environmental ethics refers to the issues, principles and guidelines relating to human interactions with their environment. These two central concept, environmental awareness and environmental ethics towards ecology and environment helps to recognise the interrelation between men and environment to acquire a set of values and feeling of concern for the environment and the motivation for participating in environmental improvement and protection and acquiring the skill for identifying environmental problems.

Our mother earth is the most precious gift of universe and women folk which represent half the population of the world have dominant role to play towards protection and conservation of the earth's ecology. Repeated research has shown that the women folk particularly living in village area have closer relation with the environment and the natural resources than men. This closeness therefore makes women more nurturing and caring towards their environment. The life of village women is so interconnected with the environment that the whole ecosystem revolves around her. As a perfect manager of the ecosystem, she manages agricultural lands, animals, households activities and health care practices. They have also the responsibility of collecting food, fuel and fodder from the environment. So there is not simply an inherent connection between women and nature rather there is material realities exist.

Throughout history woman had been excluded from development models. But in recent time, from about the 1980' a 'newer' perspective began to make its way into the development paradigm which included the role of women towards healthy and hygienic environment which is known as women, environment and development (WED). Under this aspect the women folk specially the rural women need to be empowered vigorously so that they can play a dominant role as better managers, entrepreneurs, communicators, innovators and so on towards quantitative and qualitative development in the existing socio economic scenery aiming at improving the living conditions of a society.

Several studies have been conducted on environmental awareness and environmental ethics. **Prasad, Sayi (1987)** conducted a study entitled “Environmental awareness: A study on the Women of a South Indian Village” The researcher made an attempt to assess the environmental awareness of the village folk in order to make recommendation for the improvement through environmental education. The researcher found the lack of awareness and knowledge on environment among rural woman of scheduled castes. **Dubey and Samal(1998)** conducted a study on “Environmental Awareness among women to find out the influence of the residential background, educational status, the interaction on environmental awareness among women” .The study revealed that the environmental awareness of urban women was significantly higher than that of rural women. The environmental awareness of urban women was significantly higher than that of uneducated women. **Lyndem and Singh(2000)** studied the “Environmental Awareness among adult illiterates in Byrnthat, Ri-Bhoi District (Meghalaya)”. The people of Byrnihat were found conscious about the degradation, utilization and conservation of natural resources and about water and air pollution The cultivators were of the effects of chemical fertilizers for increasing crop yields They were also aware of the consequences of slash and burn method of shifting cultivation. **Sharma, B (2002)**, conducted a study on ‘Environmental Education and Awareness among the Secondary students of Nagaon town’. The study revealed that the activities of the schools regarding environmental education were not adequate as all the students did not participate in the environmental awareness programmes. **Pradhan , G.C (2002)** made a study on ‘environmental awareness among secondary school teacher’s. There was significant difference between mean environmental scores of the teachers of rural and urban schools. **Bhattacharjee, Tanushree (2003)**, carried out a study on ‘Environmental Education and Awareness in the Secondary Schools of Silchar, Assam. She found that more than 83 percent schools involve themselves in plantation of trees, generating quiz and debate competition etc. **G. Raju(2007)** in his study on “Environmental Ethics of Higher Secondary Student” found that the environmental ethics of the higher secondary students of Cuddlier district is high. The study also revealed female students have more environmental ethics than male students. The communities of students and types of schools where they happened to study does have any influence on their environmental ethics. **Goswami Sadhana (2010)** conducted ‘a study on the role of women in environmental protection with reference to Kamrup District’. **Hongxianduan, Rosanne Fortner(2011)** revealed that female students of America and China felt that risk is more to human health and environment rather than the male students . **Das Nanima (2013)** carried our ‘A comparative study on Environment Awareness among the students of Rural and Urban colleges under Gauhati University, Assam’. **Ghosh Kumud (2014)** conducted a study on “Environmental Awareness Among Secondary School Students of Golaghat District in the state of Assam and their Attitude towards Environmental Education” .

II. Significance of the study

In the 21st Century, Global environment and ecology are rapidly becoming the most demanding subjects for debate, decisions and action as the emergence of environmental problems and environmental degradation create a great challenge for the human survival in the earth. It is rightly said, “The environmental crisis is an outward manifestation of the crisis of mind and spirit”. It all depends on how do we think and act. Hence it is essential to day every individual should be made aware of the environment for sustainable development and to realize that nature is not gift to us from our forefather but a loan to bestow it to our generation. To awaken the people, women folk must be awakened first. Once she is on the move, the village moves and the nation moves, But unfortunately women specially the rural women are less aware about their health , hyeigine , sanitation , pollution of environment due to which sometimes unknowingly they used to do unhealthy environmental activities in their day to day activities like cooking of food using traditional smokeless Chullah, defection in open field , practising traditional Jhoom Cultivation, burning of plastics, using same water for drinking, washing clothes etc. which may lead to health hazards, pollution , global warming in long run.

So it is the need of the hour to make them aware, concern and responsible towards environment .Keeping this view in mind, in the present study an attempt has been made to study the awareness and ethics of rural women especially in Baridua area towards their health, hygiene, sanitation, protection and conservation of environment.

III. Objective of the study

1. To find out the environmental awareness among village women in Baridua area towards health, hygiene, sanitation with respect to tribal and non tribal women.
2. To study the environmental ethics among village women towards protection and conservation of environment with respect to tribal and non tribal women.

IV. Methodology

In the present study, the investigator used Descriptive Survey method for collecting pertinent data for the purpose of the study. Data analysis included tabulation and percentage.

Population and Sample

The study was carried out in Baridua area (9th mile) of Ri-bhoi district of Meghalaya. In the present study, the population comprises all the rural women of this area. A sample of 68 rural women was selected by adapting proportionate stratified random sampling. In the selection of sample, the population was stratified into two strata as tribal and non-tribal women. Then from Tribal women group 35 representative and from non tribal women group 33 representative were selected randomly.

Tools used

For examining the environmental awareness among rural women in Baridua area, the investigator used self developed questionnaire towards environmental awareness and environmental ethics. The questionnaire mainly covered different areas like health and hygiene, forests, pollution, population concern and environmental concern towards protection and conservation. The questionnaire in environmental awareness consists of 10 statements and the questionnaire in environmental ethics consists of 10 questions.

V. Main findings

Major findings of the study has been given below

1. From the observation, it was found that in some cases, most of the respondents were not aware of environment. That is why majority of respondents were not concern with ill effect of joom cultivation ,burning of plastic bags, tyres , using of same ponds for domestic and drinking purpose etc. but in some cases like health diseases caused by environmental pollution, conservation of forest for next generation, use of bio fertilizer they were more concern towards environment, health and hygiene.
2. From the further it was found that in some cases, most of the respondents did not have environmental responsibility to protect and conserve their environment. That is why they used plastic bags, traditional Chullah etc. but in some cases like plantation of trees, saving of energy by switching off light and fan, cleaning of drains regularly they showed their responsibility towards environment, health and hygiene.

Result And Discussion

The result of the present study revealed that rural women in relation to the tribal and non-tribal group had low level of environmental awareness in some aspects. Majority of the respondents i.e. 77.1% tribal women and 90.9% non tribal women agreed that burning of plastic bags, tyres do not release toxic gases.37.1% tribal women and 45.4% non tribal women constructed cattle shed adjacent to the living house .Again majority of the respondents 77.1% tribal women and 69.7% non tribal women disagreed that people having no concern for environmental protection should be penalised.Only 34.2% tribal women and 42.4% non tribal women agreed that same ponds should not use for both domestic an drinking purpose. But regarding jhoom cultivation both the two groups had showed different concern as majority i.e, 85.7% tribal women agreed that jhoom cultivation is essential to increase agriculture yields whereas only 33.3% non tribal women agreed the necessity of jhum cultivation. Again in some aspects both tribal and non tribal rural women have high level of environmental awareness. Majority of the respondent's i.e, 80% tribal women and 90% non tribal rural women agreed that defection in open fields make soil polluted. Again both the groups i.e. 100%

respondents of tribal and non tribal women agreed that conservation of forest is necessary for the sake of future generation. 82.5% tribal women and 81.8% non tribal women agreed that all are responsible for environmental pollution and 68.6% tribal women and 78.7% non tribal women agreed that environmental pollution leads to health diseases.

Regarding environmental ethics, Majority of the village women had environmental concern and responsibility towards health, hygiene and sanitation, especially towards plantation of trees, cleaning of drains regularly, saving electric energy etc. However 85.7 % tribal women and 93.9% non-tribal women save their electric energy which shows a little bit difference among them. Whereas regarding plantation of trees both tribal and non tribal women have same level of environmental concern.

Some activities like using of plastic bags, not involving in cleanliness activities in the local area, non participation in environmental awareness programme ,using of traditional chullah etc. revealed that majority of village women did not show concern and ethics towards environment. 80% tribal and 75.8% non tribal women used traditional chullah. All respondents of both the two groups used plastic bags. 71.4% tribal and 66.7 % non-tribal women did not take participation in any environmental awareness programme.

The study reveals that in some aspects like celebration of functions and festivals without using fire crackers and loudspeakers and complaining against wastes dumping etc., both the two groups , tribal and non tribal had differences. Only 28.6% tribal women used fire crackers and loudspeakers in their festival whereas most of the non tribal women i.e 84.8% used all these things. Again only 34.2 % tribal women complained against wastes dumping. Whereas the percentage of non tribal women in complaining against wastes dumping is quite high i.e. 57.6%. It might be due to lack of dissemination of knowledge, ignorance and education among tribal women.

Conclusion

The present study was undertaken in Baridua area of Ri-Bhoi District, Meghalaya. It was found that majority of the respondents among rural women had awareness and concerns towards environmental health, hygiene, sanitation, protection and conservation. But in some aspects still rural women of this area showed lower level of environmental ethics and responsibilities towards hygienic condition, causes of pollution, environmental degradation etc. Environment, particularly the natural environment is a precious gift of the creator and so everybody should have to show responsibility towards environment. "If you plan for one year, plant rice, if you plan for few years, plant trees and if you plan for hundred years, educate people". So if we want to save our mother earth we have to make our mankind flourish, where there is a strong need to conserve our natural resources and make judicious use of them for getting a balanced environment. Especially women folk should take active involvement in social and community organisation. To motivate the rural women environmental awareness programmes should be undertaken by the government and NGO s. It is hoped that the

present study will open a new vista for carrying out further investigation in the field for the advancement of environmental awareness and environmental ethics.

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