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Special Issue on

Role of Environmentalists for the Conservation of Nature (REC�-2026)

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### 13. Indian Women's role in Environment Conservation

**Dr. Dilip N. Lanjewar**  
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#### Introduction :-

Women are at the forefront of environmental protection because they play a more critical role than men in handling natural resources at the family and community levels. "In communities around the world, women manage water, fuel, food, as well as forests and agricultural farm. Women play a critical role in managing natural resources on family and community levels and are most affected by environmental degradation. In communities around the world, women manage water, sources for fuel, and food, as well as both forests and agricultural terrain. Women produce 60 to 80 percent of food in developing countries, while inheritance laws and local customs often prevent them from owning or leasing land and securing loans or insurance. From the high level to the grassroots, the 1992 UN Earth Summit, India's Chipko movement and Kenya's Green Belt Movement all highlighted the role of women's voices and perspectives in sustainable development.

Across the regions and cultures of the world, women play critical roles in relation to their natural environment. Often deeply dependent on available natural resources for food, fuel and shelter, women can be particularly vulnerable to environmental changes or threats. Because women's workload is often centered on managing natural resources, biodiversity and ecosystems, their experiences and perspectives are essential to sustainable development policymaking and actions at every level, for a healthy planet for generations to come.

#### Environment Conservation Movement in India

Some of the most iconic environmental movements of the world - the Chipko Movement, the Navdanya Movement, the Narmada Bachao Andolan - originated in India, helmed by women who were breaking new ground. Powerful, moving images of the leaders

of these historic campaigns combined with the contributions of others including Sunderlal Bahuguna, Indira Gandhi, Maneka Gandhi, Sunita Narain, Vandana Shiva, Medha Patkar, Nandini Velho, Saalumarada Thimmakka, Shehla Masood's empower new generations of women to join the struggle for environmental conservation.

After all the alarm bells have sounded, people from across the world have woken up to see the catastrophe exactly as it is, happening right in front of their eyes. While we cannot go back and change the past, we can try to undo the damage we have inflicted upon our planet. To this effect, there are some people who are doing more than most, in order to save the world we live in. Among them, are a few women whose battle against climate change might be the inspiration we need to break our silence and act.

At a time and age when new and emerging concerns about the environment are throwing up serious challenges, it's only indispensable that all the global citizens come together to tackle this very serious menace of environmental degradation that is threatening our very existence. Yet throughout history and even now we continuously come across names that sincerely work towards creating a better tomorrow by fostering a better present through their whole-hearted efforts.

Since the 15th century, the Bishnoi community in Rajasthan has been devoted to environmental protection. One of the most famous of environmentalists in India is Sunderlal Bahuguna, propagator of the Chipko movement. The highly successful environmental conservation program that was accomplished with the help of the locals is a stark reminder of how stature becomes powerless in the face of persisting unity. A key player in the evolution of the Chipko Movement in India, Sarla Behn is a Gandhian environmental activist who helped create awareness about the environmental

destruction in the Himalayan forests of the state. Sarla's role in propagating the Chiko movement was no less crucial than those of its spear headers. She urged the movement in its resistant to lumbering and excessive tapping of resin from the pine trees.

### Indian Women's Role in Environment Conservation: -

One of the famous early environmentalists in India has been Indira Gandhi, the country's only woman Prime Minister. In her term as the Prime Minister Gandhi indeed has been authoritative and strongly political. But what remains a fact is that she was something of a naturalist herself. Not only did she formulate the Wildlife Protection Act, but also she was an active crusader of the Save the Tiger campaign.

Medha Patkar has been one among the more famous environmentalist in India. The revolutionary Narmada Bachao Andolan initiated by her has been instrumental in bringing a change in the environmental process in India. Her fight for the cause of justice of the dam project affected people has claimed her the Right Livelihood Award and the 1992 Goldman Prize for Asia.

In today's world Sunita Narain is an Indian environmentalist and political activist as well as a major proponent of the Green concept of sustainable development. Ms Sunita Narain is an environmentalist and author. She is currently the Director General of Center for Science and Environment (CSE) and Editor of the fortnightly magazine, *Down To Earth*. In 2016, Time Magazine listed her as one of the 100 most influential people in the world. Her work is to research the interface between food and the environment. She works to ensure that countries in the Southern world do not adopt highly chemical-intensive agricultural systems, as they do not have the capacity to mitigate and manage the toxic fallout on the environment and human health.

Dr. Vandana Shiva is an environmental activist; founder of Navdanya Trust; and author of more than 20 books about protecting the diversity of living resources, especially native seeds, and promotion of organic farming and fair trade. She was identified as an environmental hero by Time magazine in 2003, and Asia Week

has called her one of the five most powerful communicators in Asia. She has been identified one of the seven most powerful women on the globe by Forbes magazine.

The contribution of 107-year-old Padma Shri, Saalumara Thimmakka is an Indian environmentalist who became one without any conscious thought or effort. Pained by not having children, she planted over 8,000 trees, including hundreds of banyan trees. She worked as a daily-wage labourer. Banyan trees were available in plenty in her village and Thimmakka and her husband began grafting saplings from these trees and planting them alongside the road connecting to their closest village.

Environmentalists encourage through writings like Sugathakumari who is an Indian poet and environmentalist who has been at the forefront of environmental and feminist movements in Kerala. She played a big role in the Save Silent Valley protest. She formed Abhayagrama, aka Abhayagramam, a home for destitute women (Athani) and a day-care centre for the mentally ill. She was the former chairperson of the Kerala State Women's Commission.

In Politics but out of politics is Maneka Gandhi who's activism and vocal nature finds vent in various causes- but before anything, she describes herself as an animal lover and environmentalist. Belonging to the Political powerhouse Gandhi clan, her environmentalism also met political backing, as she became the Minister for Environment and Forests from 1989-91 on Atal Bihari Bajpayee's council. Currently, she is Modi's Minister for Women and Child Development. She is an internationally acclaimed public figure as she has lead from the front over 9 organizations which fight against evils like animal testing in laboratories, the municipal killing of homeless dogs, the unregulated sale of airguns and a ban on mobile or travelling zoos. Gandhi even founded the organisation People for Animals in 1992, which is currently India's largest organisation for animal rights. Besides that, she has pledged herself to a life of Veganism, on ethical and health grounds.

**Saalumarad Thimmakka**

An Indian environmentalist hailing from a small village called Hudur in the state of Karnataka, hers is a simple story with a soul. She planted and nurtured a staggering 384 banyan trees in a four-kilometer stretch, on a barren highway running from Hulikal and Kudur. They say these Banyan saplings, which she and her husband picked from their native village where they were in plenty, were like her own little children – because she was unable to have any. She has been a recipient of the National Citizen's Award of India. An L.A. based environmental organisation named itself Thimmakka's Resources for Environmental Education, as a tribute to her. Vandana Shiva has dedicated a lifetime to three causes – Environmentalism, Anti-Globalization, and Ecofeminism. And she has done equal justice to all three causes by fervently joining and founding NGO's to lobby for, as well as authoring and co-authoring over 200 books on the subjects. As an environmentalist, she has championed farmer's rights, supported various studies and research programmes that would help organic farming, and taken up campaigns for the preservation of biodiversity. TIME declared her an Environmental Hero in 2003. One of her pet causes is the rejection of corporate patents over seeds, which is one of the most prominent is Dr

Purnima Devi Barman who is one of the most prominent environmentalists and popularly known as "Hargila baido". She is a conservation biologist with the NGO, Aaranyak, in Assam. She has been conferred with Nari Shakti Purashkar by the President of India which is the highest civilian award for Indian women.

Purnima is the founder of a group called "Hargila army" which provides a voice to rural women as protector of the tree and she has organized over 200 local women into this army to implement Hargila conservation. She now has 400 rural women as members into the group to voice for nature. Her immense dedication has given the communities a voice and she has set up a model for community conservation by building strong ownership.

Thus, we can say that The world's women are the key to sustainable development, peace and security," U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told participants at the Earth Institute's State of the Planet meeting at Columbia University, in New York City, in March 2010. Because women are the chief resource managers for their families in many parts of the world, their engagement in remedies for and adaptation to climate change is essential.

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