

The role of Mungilipattu village women in protecting the Environment

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ABSTRACT

Being one of the smallest territorial units in the Indian government structure, the village has a lot of potential and challenges. This can be seen in the high poverty rate, low level of education and the lack of proper healthcare facilities in the village. However, despite the small size of the village, it plays a vital role in the success of environmental protection in India. The village has the autonomy to develop development plans according to the specific requirements of the community. The village plays an important role in implementing sustainable methods towards the preservation of the environment. The study examines the role of women in the protection of the environment by analysing the actions and day-to-day practices of women in the village of Mungilipattu who are dedicated to protecting the environment.

Key words: Mungilipattu village, Women, Sustainability, Environmental protection, etc.

Introduction

The last few years have seen a surge in the focus on rural areas and smaller settlements in India, as part of a wider global trend. Initiatives to improve and advance villages and small settlements are becoming increasingly popular around the world. The main purpose of rural development aims to improve the working and quality of life of rural communities by harnessing local resources and possibilities, while also conserving natural and cultural resources in a sustainable way. Rural areas have traditionally been centred around agriculture, but this has changed over the last few decades, not just in India but in many European countries as well (Aggarwal, A. 2008; Belurkar *et al.*, 2003 and Etta, 1999). With declining farm incomes, changing farmland values and rising unemployment, skilled workers have started to migrate to other countries. As a result, demo-

graphic disparities are now present in many rural areas. However, rural areas are highly valued for their varied landscapes, habitats, and cultural heritage.

In the words of Aggarwal (2008), "Indigenous knowledge has proven to be not only resource-efficient but also resource-effective. It has shown that it can conserve and manage resources better than the externally driven, technocratic and resource-intensive systems that we see in the world today." The Chipko movement is a well-known environmental movement. It was a grass-roots initiative taken by the local communities, especially the impoverished women, against the exploitation of the natural resources which are essential for their livelihoods. The well-to-do contractors exploiting the forest reserves threatened the social, economic, and cultural structure of the hill people. They resisted the indiscriminate cutting of the trees considering the impact on

the fragile ecosystem. Not only did the Chipko movement highlight the need for community involvement in protecting the environment, but it also raised awareness of environmental issues around the world, as Kumar (2006) points out. The growing importance of the women in the environment sector is further confirmed by the women living in a rural village (Jharkhand). These women are committed to the cause of sustainable community farming in the face of exploitation, money lending, land grabbing, land erosion by Sinha, etc. In Paharpur tribal village of Jharkhand where only one educated woman completed her school education, she was saddened to see members of her community leaving farming due to loss of land, aridity of land, land grabbing, migration, among others. Inspired by her desire to stop this migration, she joined the self-help group and started educating the other women of the village about the idea of community farming. Together, they turned the dry rocky land into fertile land.

The villagers' rate of migration decreased drastically, resulting in an overall increase in their overall well-being. Nowadays, the village has financial stability, food security and the children can go to school which was previously restricted due to seasonal migration. It is important to understand the various ways women have chosen to actively contribute to the protection and management of the environment. This manuscript aims to analyse women's involvement in environmental management in a small village to understand their contribution to environmental initiatives. The main objective of the paper is to identify the key factors that influence women's attitudes towards environmental protection. To achieve this, a survey was created to collect secondary data on women's attitudes and actions in the village of Mungilipattu.

The study revealed that the women in Mungilipattu were actively involved in various environmental activities, such as tree plantation drives and waste management, as well as protecting natural resources. Their involvement went beyond their household activities and extended to community-wide activities, showing their commitment to protecting the environment. The findings of this case study highlight the importance of recognising and promoting the role of women in protecting the environment. Women should be given equal opportunities, resources, and opportunities to be actively involved in sustainable processes and decision-making. By harnessing the power of women, we can cre-

ate a greener, more sustainable future for all.

Study area

Mungillipattu is a village in Chandragiri mandal in Sri Balaji district, Andhra Pradesh state, India. It is part of a larger region known as the 'Rayalaseema'. The village is located 5 KM (from Chandragiri, India) and 21 KM (from Sri Balaji, Andhra Pradesh, India). Telugu is the local language of the village. According to the 2011 Census, the total population of the village is 1749 with 519 houses. The total number of female inhabitants is 891. The village has a literacy rate of 64.3 % and a female literacy rate of 28.4 %. The main occupations in the village are cattle maintenance, agri-food (seasonal crops and vegetables) and dairy farming. Some residents also work in various jobs and businesses located in and around the state capital, Tirupati. To this study, two sets of data are used. The first set of data comes from secondary source materials collected from previous studies conducted on women's participation in environmental protection and management. The second set of results was obtained directly from primary sources through the distribution of questionnaires to women living in the village of Mungilipattu Village.

Review

Women in Dairy

According to a 1991 report by the World Bank (6), it has been estimated that around 86% of rural women are involved in various agricultural operations. In India, women account for 93% of the total employment in dairy production. Research by Belurkar *et al.* (2003) confirms that women have long played an integral role in dairy and animal husbandry activities, alongside their daily household responsibilities. The significant role and contribution of women in rural families to dairying in rural India is widely acknowledged yet remains unrecorded. Women in Mungilipattu village have showcased their vital participation in dairy farming, along with their noteworthy efforts towards environmental conservation.

Women in Water resource management

Etta, (1999), conducted a research project in Mariko Lower-income settlement in Lagos. The focus of her project was to highlight the crucial role that women play in managing communal water resources and

meeting household water needs. It was observed that women are primarily responsible for supervising communal taps or water points, taking necessary measures to protect these sources from damage caused by children. Similar activities were also observed in Mungilipattu village. Within households, the responsibility of fetching water for various domestic purposes such as cooking and cleaning falls on women and girls. On the other hand, men typically have control over the water trade. Unfortunately, these water sources are vulnerable to pollution, especially from untreated sewage, which poses significant health risks (Olanrenwaju and Ogunleye, 2007; Solomon 2014). In rural areas, women are solely responsible for obtaining water for their households, as observed in Mungilipattu village. However, the methods used to collect water, particularly from riverbanks, contribute to water contamination.

Women in Agriculture

The Food and Agriculture Organization recognized the significant role of women in global agricultural production in 1996. They reported that women were responsible for producing more than half of all food. In India, rural women are vital contributors to food production, accounting for approximately 60-80% of the total output. In Mungilipattu village, women not only participate in agricultural activities but also engage in various related fields such as livestock rearing, horticulture, post-harvesting operations, and agro/social forestry. However, the level and nature of their involvement in agricultural production vary depending on the specific agro production systems. The extent of female participation in farming activities is influenced by the landowning status of farm households, with women assuming roles that range from managers to landless labourers. On average, women in Mungilipattu village contribute around 55% to 66% of the total labour in farm production.

Women in Solid waste disposal

In the village of Mungilipattu, the production of solid waste is exceeding the rate of population growth. Typically, solid waste is disposed of in designated landfills or undeveloped areas. Women, who have a strong connection to the environment, actively participate in environmental conservation efforts by engaging in tasks such as cleaning and maintaining cleanliness. This is especially true when

it comes to waste management within their homes and in the surrounding areas. Recognizing the health risks associated with waste, women take on the responsibility of ensuring its proper and consistent removal at the community level.

Results

The subsequent section provides an overview of the findings obtained from the questionnaire study conducted to assess the level of women's involvement in environmental conservation in Mungilipattu Village. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics, specifically the age and marital status, of the women who participated in the survey. It is important to note that only a small percentage, precisely 13.3%, of the surveyed women are below the age of 22. The majority, accounting for 71.6%, fall into the middle age group (22-60 years), while only 15.1% are above the age of 60. This age distribution suggests that a significant number of women are still in their prime years and possess the necessary strength and enthusiasm to actively contribute to activities related to environmental preservation.

Table 1. Age and marital status of survey women

S.No	Age Group	Number	Percentage
1	Below 22 years	15	13.3
2	Middle age (22-60) Years	25	71.6
3	Above 60 years	10	15.1

Table 2 provides clear evidence that a significant majority of female participants, specifically 64.6%, actively engage in agricultural activities within the study area. Among these activities, farming is the most used method by women for soil conservation. Additionally, planting trees is recognized as an effective strategy for environmental protection and mitigating risks such as windstorms and erosion. The survey results further confirm the active involvement of women in tree planting, with nearly 72% of women in the study area having planted trees or flowers in the past three years. It is important to note that women often choose to plant vegetable, leafy crops, and fruit trees, which not only contribute to environmental preservation but also provide fruits for household consumption.

The examination of Mungilipattu village has brought to light a multitude of obstacles encountered by women in the realm of environmental con-

Table 2. Women involvement in Environmental Management

Involvement in Farming	Percentage (%)
Yes/No	64.6/35.4
Planting trees (Farming/Around the house)	Percentage (%)
Yes/No	72.0/28.0
Conserving methods farming/planting	Percentage (%)
Major activities in Environmental Cleaning	Percentage (%)
Weeding/Sweeping/Drainage/Solid waste management	26/48/16/10

servation, as emphasized by the participants. Primarily, the lack of public understanding about environmental issues was acknowledged as a major hindrance. Additionally, the insufficiency of waste management facilities was noted, and lastly, shortcomings were observed in the drainage systems.

Recommendations

1. To promote Environmental preservation in Mungilipattu village, it is crucial to encourage the active participation of women in environmental management, while acknowledging the challenges they currently encounter.
2. Implementing mandatory environmental education for a substantial number of women in Mungilipattu village is essential to instigate a shift in the public mindset and provide them with necessary knowledge.
3. By recognizing and endorsing the empowerment of women in sustainable human development and acknowledging their crucial role in environmental conservation, we can effectively tackle the issue of individuals carelessly littering paper scraps, fruit peels, plastic bottles, and polythene bags on the streets for leisure purposes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the active involvement of both married and unmarried women from the Kotala village in environmental protection efforts is evident. However, it is worth noting that a significant number of women engaged in these initiatives are married. This indicates that married women have shown a strong inclination towards taking responsibility for preserving and maintaining a clean environment, considering their roles as homemakers. This study has thoroughly examined the various ways in which women have actively participated in safeguarding

the environment and promoting the sustainable use of natural resources. The recommendations presented in the document emphasize the importance of empowering women and recognizing their vital roles as resource managers, environmental advocates, and community activists. It is crucial to ensure that women have equal opportunities to engage in environmental initiatives at all levels, from local to international. Achieving gender equality in decision-making bodies is essential for women to effectively contribute to environmental preservation. Providing consultation and support to women in their conservation efforts is imperative, as is enhancing their involvement in shaping environmental policies, programs, and funding allocations.

Conflict of Interest: None

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