

ROLE OF WOMEN IN ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: AN INTROSPECTION TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY

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Article history:	Abstract:
Published: 10 th March 2022	Nature doesn't depend on humans but humans are highly dependent on every inch of mother nature. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced us to realize what our priorities should be. Time has come to pause and think in what direction we are going. We have to relook our approaches. Rapid industrialization has resulted in deteriorating as well as depletion of natural resources. Degradation of the natural environment due to human exploitation brought about the need to introduce the concept of sustainable development. India is one of the pioneers in recognizing the importance of sustainable development. Sustainable development can only be achieved when women are equitably involved alongside men. The main aim of the article is to present the ways in which women can contribute to sustainable development.
Keywords: Sustainable development, Gender equality, work-life integration, Vedas, Sustainable development goals	

1. INTRODUCTION

Vedas, the oldest religious text considers women as the foundation for society and home. It is an irony that in wake of foreign invasions over the centuries we are forgetting what our ancestors were practicing and have become more conservative. As per Vedic Dharma, the first and foremost criteria for the success of a society is that women are accorded the high respect that they rightly deserve. The same is reflected by the mantra from Rigveda (Rigveda 6.61.2).

इयं शुष्मेभिर्विसखाइवारुजत्सानु गिरीणां तविषेभिरूर्मिभिः ।
पारावतघ्नीमवसे सुवृत्तिभिः सरस्वतीमा विवासेम धीतिभिः ॥

Translation: O Learned woman, as a river breaks away the mightiest of hills and rocks, so the wise, enlightened woman destroys ignorance and misperceptions through her intellect. May we honor our women through politeness and noble actions [1].

India has a rich cultural heritage where human civilizations have lived in harmony with nature. Indians have been worshipping forces of nature. The concept of sustainable development is not new to Indians. Degradation of the natural environment due to human exploitation brought about the need to introduce the concept of sustainability. Sustainability was formally defined by the United Nations Brundtland Commission in 1987 as "Meeting needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" [2]. Sustainable development is a compelling idea for many people. It is concerned with how we can contribute to some of the most significant challenges that the world faces today – from climate change and biodiversity, to working conditions and health amongst the poorest in the world. Sustainable development cannot be achieved when females who comprise nearly half of the population are not living a dignified life.

2. MATERIALS, METHODS AND REVIEW

The methodology of this paper is descriptive and information was collected from secondary sources which include research articles, websites, religious books.

According to Alteker (2014), in ancient India, women were treated at par with men [3]. Indian Culture had no place for gender discrimination. This is evident from the example of Rani Laxmi Bai, Rani Abbakka, Matangini Hazra, Chakali Ilanna or Parbati Giri, Kanaklata Barua, Aruna Asaf Ali, Bhikaji Cama, Lakshmi Sahgal and others. Even in recent times women have made a mark in each and every field be it, Mother Teresa, women self-help groups who are always on the forefront to help during and after a disaster is only among numerous examples of how women have contributed to the safety and sustainability of society.

According to the World Commission on Environment and Development, sustainable development satisfies the needs of the present generation without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to satisfy them [2]. The goal of sustainable development is to improve people's living standards and improve access to natural resources for future generations. Understanding the importance of sustainable development UN General Assembly on 25th September 2015 adopted a resolution regarding the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to transform our world [4]:

- GOAL 1: No Poverty
- GOAL 2: Zero Hunger
- GOAL 3: Good Health and Well-being
- GOAL 4: Quality Education
- GOAL 5: Gender Equality
- GOAL 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
- GOAL 7: Affordable and Clean Energy
- GOAL 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
- GOAL 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- GOAL 10: Reduced Inequality
- GOAL 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
- GOAL 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
- GOAL 13: Climate Action
- GOAL 14: Life Below Water
- GOAL 15: Life on Land
- GOAL 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions
- GOAL 17: Partnerships to achieve the Goal

All these 17 goals are arranged into four heads based on their intended outcomes

Wellbeing- Comprises of goals 1,3,4,5,10,16

Infrastructure – Comprises of goals 2,6,7,8,9,11,12

Natural Environment – Comprises of goals 13,14,15

Partnership- Goal 17

In India government is committed to gender equality. Various initiatives by Government -prime minister's Beti Bachao Beti Padhao aims at equal opportunity and education for girls in India. In addition, specific interventions on female employment, programmes on the empowerment of adolescent girls, the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana on girl child prosperity and the Janani Suraksha Yojana for mothers.

Despite the number of steps taken by the government, the picture is not a decent one, Child sex ratio is 919 girls for 1000 boys. In our country, 65.46% of the women are literate as compared to 82.4% of men which gives us a clear picture that the education of men is considered as more important as compared to women. In Primary education enrolment of girls is 100% but only 25.4% of women get enrolled in higher education. Women workforce is only 27.4% and they hold only 11% of seats in the Lok Sabha. One more area of concern is violence against women, it is shocking that 1 in every 3 women have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence in their lifetimes [5].

Women have always been multi-tasking and are responsible for creating a more accommodating society. Be it Social sustainability, environmental sustainability or economic sustainability if women are left outside the process no goal can be achieved. Pal (2019) suggested that Women play a key role in strengthening the dynamism of human civilization [6]. But the harsh reality is that 48% of the population is still denied equal social, domestic, economic, educational, religious and political status. According to Stevens (2009), It is the responsibility of governments to make the green economy sustainable by giving preference to women and other disadvantaged groups by including quotas, companies need to adopt family-friendly practices including child care, flexible work and extended leave. Discriminatory practices need to do away with [7].

WOMEN → Sustainable development

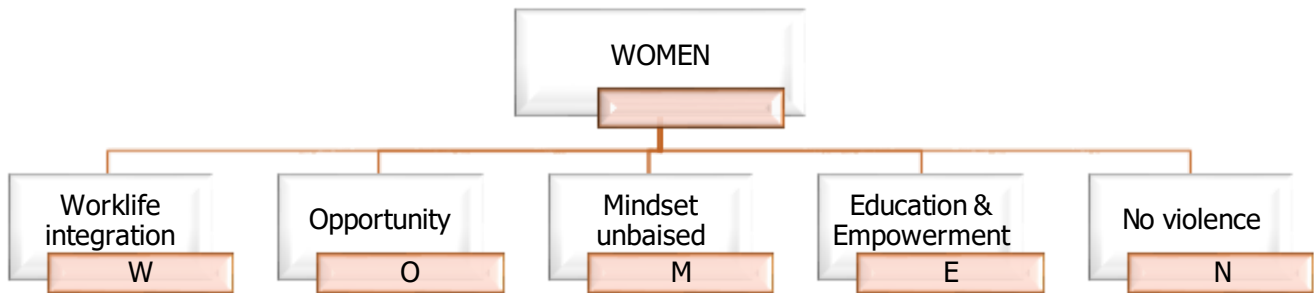
W-Work life integration: Women are having greater family responsibilities and what can be done about that? We need to create work-life integration.

O-Opportunity: we need to create opportunities for women by providing employment in non-traditional jobs.

M-mindset unbiased: What hampers their growth is the biased mindset of people around her

E-Education & Empowerment: Structural change needs to be brought by educating and empowering women. Men also need to be educated to make them gender-sensitive.

N-No Violence: A harmonious co-existence of all. We need society free from any kind of crime against women.



3. CONCLUSION

It is a wake-up time as our planet is crying for help as it is reeling under the burden of unbridled greed. Women have to be made equal partners in every sphere which can be done by involving women in more productive and decision-making roles. They can be helpful to achieve not only Social sustainability, environmental sustainability but also economic sustainability. We need to understand that leaving women outside the process will be of no good.

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