



Short Review Paper

Gendering climate change discourse in India

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Abstract

The paper attempts to underscore how the climate change discourses have undermined the role and responsibilities of women who are almost missing in the discourse. I have picked up two approaches, the environment modernization approach and environment security approach to advance my arguments. The former implies that climate change issues have nothing to do with gender as they involve highly technical aspects deserving techno centric approach. Secondly, the security approach entails that environment concerns should be taken more seriously as they are going to pose greater threat than the terrorism. I argue that security concerns have injected elements of masculinity in the environment politics discourse. A way forward to bring women in climate change discourse lies in her empowerment and delegating space to her traditional knowledge system.

Keywords: Climate Change, Gender, NAPCC, Ecological Modernisation, Environmental Security.

Introduction

Like many rural women worldwide, Durga Devi of Jalaun district in Uttar Pradesh, spends hours each day fetching water to meet daily requirements of her family members. The wells that used to provide abundant quantity of fresh and clean water have dramatically dried over the past few years, and therefore Durga Devi now must travel farther distance to collect water. This extra mile can mean insecurity due to difficult terrain, impact on health due to carrying water load for more time and a child missing her school back home to complete home chores in absence of her mother.

Frequent occurrence of droughts, floods, storms as a result of climate change are already impacting the economies, development discourse and is inducing climate stressed migration. These challenges are going to alter the politics of this century. It is evident that no one will evade the harmful consequences of climate change but the impact is going to be disproportional and not universally alike. The story of Durga Devi is not an aloof empirical citation. Studies have shown that women disproportionately suffer the impacts of disasters, severe weather events, and climate change. Rural women limited access to resources, restricted rights, widespread patriarchal structure, restricted mobility and muted voice in decision making, makes them highly precarious to climate change risks. For instance, drought or flood due to global climate change, can further cause difficulties for women in health, sanitation, continuation of paid labour, attendance at school by young girls, potential violence etc. Particularly rural women of marginalised population are doubly burdened. They not only share caste, class division with their male counterparts but additionally bear the burden of socially constructed gender image. Water riots

leading to confrontation would only accelerate with deficit of water with the likelihood that dalit woman will be worst sufferers as politics of purity is also attached with their identity making it difficult for them to access water. Climate bride trafficking is another vulnerability which is likely to increase with water stress whereby in non likelihood of parents marrying their daughter to men of such places, brides are trafficked from poor regions of the country.

All these combine to make some women more vulnerable in particular locations, situations and time since they face different condition of vulnerability than men.

Where is women in climate discourse?

Especially after recently concluded COP21 Paris draft, environmental concerns is receiving deserved attention after scientific and political denial of long held view that climate change is a farce and is not a real event. While historical polluter debate has got its well placed meaning in language of Paris draft, shifting the burden to cut emissions more on developed economies, what still is missing is gender. Mary Robinson a UN special envoy for climate change accurately pointed that Paris climate summit's gender imbalance with heavy male dominance is detrimental to taking action on saving people from global warming. Analysing the women participation data, it has come to evidence that woman are minimally present in any breakthrough discussion or deal. Their concerns are largely omitted in major environmental deals by governments, international organisation. Consequently as a result, the design of adaptation and mitigation efforts tailored at these levels targets the remedy to climate change as a gender neutral problem, when it is not.

To illustrate it further, I examined India's key climate document - National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), through lens of these questions in context of gender. First and foremost analysis which emerges out is that, NAPCC was formulated by a high power male dominated council under the leadership of Prime Minister. There was no engagement of practioners working at ground level or women centric NGO'S in NAPCC council.

11th Five Year Plan which also is a reference point, through which 8 missions of NAPCC will be implemented, doesn't focus on women and environment. NAPCC document refer to gender (understood as synonym to women) only at two places in an entire 56 pages document:

One of the guiding principles of reads: *"Protecting the poor and vulnerable sections of society through an inclusive and sustainable development strategy, sensitive to climate change."*

The other very specific mention of gender is in the section 1.1 of the technical document. It says: *"The impacts of climate change could prove particularly severe for women. With climate change, there would be an increasing scarcity of water, reduction of yields in forest biomass, and increased risks to human health for children, women and the elderly in a household becoming the most vulnerable. With the possibility of decline in the availability of food grains, the threat of malnutrition may also increase. All these would add to deprivations that many women already encounter and so in each of the Adaptation programs, special attention should be paid to the aspect of gender."*

The problematic approach as concluded from an analysis of NAPCC'S document is that only the word of concern has been incorporated into the document and no real plan for action. The adaptation mission as elaborated in NAPCC pay no attention to the fact the women must pay an important centric role in being part of the result oriented climate change plan. NAPCC seems to remain ignorant that women should be incorporated into the vertical decision making system. They must be in control over productive resources and should have ownership over it. It is quite evident that NAPCC doesn't acknowledge the position of women as knowledge manager in adaptation programmes to climate change. All this directly concludes at NAPCC's gender non neutrality tilt.

How climate change discourses has acquired apparent masculinisation?

For this apparent masculinisation in gender rhetoric to climate change, two stereotypically masculine discourses, I put forth here to understand it are:

Ecological Modernisation Approach: Climate Change is widely advertised and understood as a technical and scientific problem. Being so it requires outright technical remedies. Among the reason to an absence of gender significance in

climate change discourse is scientists held belief that climate change is a universal problem, impacting all alike and thus requires one action plan. It doesn't take into account cultural and social significance into account whereby majority of women are precariously located.

This scientific definition of climate change has been mainly fostered by the rhetoric of Ecological Modernisation (EM) approach. This approach has engaged United Kingdom and Europe in its control and recently it is seen to advocate the policy discourse of USA too. To simply put - Ecological Modernisation approach renders the use of "technological advancement to bring about (both) better environmental performance and economic efficiency in a win-win situation" Schlosberg and Rinfert (2008). Thus, it focuses extravagantly on supply side of development. Thus solutions like carbon capture and storage, carbon sequestration, renewable energy sources including wind - solar - geothermal power - bio-fuels, genetically modified crops etc are showcased as only solution to survive this catastrophe. While there is no denial that some among these solutions are important for a sustainable development. But they seem to have distanced themselves from an objective of sustainable development which takes into account human concerns, social aspects of life too. The existence of Ecological Modernisation approach is relatively dependent on cooperation among government (male dominated) fostering technical solutions rather than proposing policies which are inclusive of gender differences to climate change as emanating from geographical cultures and social norms. Traditional know how management at the disposal of women owing to their closer proximity to nature doesn't suit the science based business model in solving environmental issues. It reduces the serious global problem as a question in hands of technicians and capitalists to be solved in a technical language.

Environmental Security Approach (ES): The second explanation to apparent masculinisation of climate change rhetoric accrues to Environmental Security Approach. The definition of it is debatable, however in its most acceptable format, Dixon in an article-Environment, Scarcity, and Violence, explains it as a stimulator to Hobbesian predictions (Dixon 1999). It suggests that reasons to prominent conflicts in world will emanate from paucity of resources as experienced between and within states. Suggesting the same, Elliot says "Since the early 1990s, defence ministries (traditionally the domain of men) have been interpreting environmental 'insecurities' in ways that call for armed and militaristic readiness, alliances and responses" (Elliot 2015). Though, many scholars have criticised this overtly projected securitising tendency. As this will stumble the way forward to peace and cooperation that is required as a common understanding between governments since we all share a common planet. Further, it is historically proven that wars caused by militaristic fervour have only destructed environment with great loss. However such laid caution by the critics does not seem to have reached the ears and consciousness of people in power. As a

result the posing threat of climate change has been largely viewed as war over resources. It have largely been portrayed as a security threat by militaristic agencies.

As a result subsequently, the environment which once proclaimed to be an arena of 'soft politics' in the realm of international relations, has now become 'hardened' by the perceived threats to international and national order that climate change is anticipated to bring in its wake.

Conclusion

As concluded from above, the nature of climate change rhetoric which is marred in masculinity, it becomes necessary to reconceptualise the understanding of climate change from the lens of gender. To do so, it is important that research empirically defines the disproportionate impact of climate change on men and women. Further, while underscoring gender vulnerability it is important to acknowledge that woman support their household and community to adapt to abrupt climate change too. Owing to constructed gender division of labor, rural women are largely dependent on natural resources for their household work. Thus, they have generated a great deal of environmental sustainable knowledge. But, very scant regard has been given by policy makers to integrate their concerns and capacities in to mainstream policies. Thus, it is important to build on women's adaptive capacity to reduce their risk and vulnerability to climate change. It is important to be more gender sensitive in policy approach by not containing identity of women merely as a climate victim or a sole climate manager. An attempt at understanding gender constructions and changing gender relations must be aimed at. Literacy drive among woman along with economic and political empowerment are some effective climate empowerment tool.

The policy makers should include women's voice via providing greater legitimacy to their voice by accommodating them in all level of governance. This requires integration of many development projects as initiated by government for empowerment of women. A further devolution to cap women's concern and ideas can be promoted by government through financing, training them in climate related adaptation and mitigation projects.

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