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Women, water and development: Gender perspective

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ABSTRACT

This goes without saying that what water is to the 21st century, oil was to the 20th century. While access to water forms an important element of development, the gender component and relations associated form a significant subject in water collection and management. Traditionally women in Indian context have been domestic water managers purely due to gendered socialization and value orientation while men have mostly attached themselves with agriculture and irrigation labour, hence sharing different water relations. This conceptual paper critically presents an overview of the social triangle of gender, water and development to explore the relationship among the three and elucidates how procuring, managing and using water shapes and affects the gender relations in the contemporary times. The main aim is to study how water use, water collection or water management and labour associated with it shapes up gender relations and differentiates between men and women reflecting inequality, labour, power relations and development. The paper mainly uses secondary sources besides observation and discussions/interactions for locating gender between water and development today.

Key Words : Women, Water, Development, Water management, Water and power.

INTRODUCTION

Water, women and development are closely related issues. Women in domestic front carry out most of the responsibilities related to water, they are water providers, good hygiene and sanitation maintained by women through water leads to a good family health, which ultimately leads to development. In rural areas of the Global South Water collection is a major part of the work of women's daily life. There is little systematic data on this work, but fragmentary evidence from Africa and Asia suggests that the time women spend collecting water can be very significant, Ben and Farhana (2002). Women and the social relations of water have still not been fully explored academically. The time women spend in collecting water could have improved their education, economic capabilities but it is the water issue that actually hinders their well being, equality, development and education.

The fact remains that the water collection as a women's responsibility remains unpaid despite taking most of the time and energy of women and thereby actually depriving them of opportunity for income-earning work and hence leading to women disempowerment.

Women and Water: Gender Perspective :

Gender is associated with the occupations in which individuals work, Hemson David (2000)

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and gendered socialization takes place. Gender is social construct translated through roles and duties assigned to individuals on the basis of their sex. Segregation of occupations, gender based role allocations, unequal distribution of resources, discrimination at home or work place is still a reality in larger context. It is also a fact that the gender aspect influences how men and women share their work or are compensated for the same. As observed globally water is central to human life and managing water is the responsibility of the women, interweaved in her responsibilities as caregiver. Providing water to households is their prime tasks. In villages they walk long miles and in cities they wait long hours to bring water for the drinking and cleaning needs of their family, Regmi and Fawcett (1999). This scarcity of water is directly related to their lack of access to education, health and hygiene, work pressure, etc., Such a situation has a direct impact upon the women's development be that social, educational or economic.

The culture of patriarchy is still visible in most of the India's social institutions. The fact remains that the burden of water scarcity or poor water supply/no supply/tanker fed supply is mostly carried by women folk in our country. Also children and teenage girls who are no longer going to school collect domestic water. Men do not participate in domestic work because customs do not allow men to go and fetch water; it's considered part of domestic chores and against the defined gendered roles.

Because of the differing gender duties, women and men have different stakes in water use. There is a tendency to overemphasize women's reproductive roles in relation to water resource management–in other words, those tasks that span providing, managing and safeguarding water for use by the family. In most societies, women and girls collect every drop of water for cooking, bathing, cleaning, maintaining health and hygiene, raising livestock and growing food. Women and men assume different responsibilities in using and managing water and water systems. Rural men need water for irrigation and larger livestock. Water is also used in building and repair work (for example, in making bricks and in plastering), for crops and food processing, and in transport. But women have pressing needs too for water to engage in economic production, including agriculture and microenterprise. Gender disparities ensure that those needs frequently go unmet, with discrepancies in land tenure, access to water, participation, resource control, capacity and skill development, marketing and commercial linkages (GWA, 2003). Sometimes women's needs are in direct conflict with those of men: for example, food production can be an important source of family food and income for women, but women's access to irrigation is nominal.

The gender standpoint seeks to include an understanding of gender roles and relations and how these affect and are affected by water and sanitation issues and responsibilities on women. Experiences reveal that interventions, which include the views and input of both men and women generally, work better. Water is not gender neutral therefore water resource management, collection and labour associated is incomplete without a gender perspective because water directly affects women's lives both in urban and rural context. Women in water scarce urban areas hardly sleep in order to collect water even during nights and in rural areas walk miles in blazing sun to collect the water. The fact remains that women being the in charge of the household is supposed to manage all homely affairs and water is important to her being the basic need of her family be that for drinking, cooking, washing clothes, domestic hygiene, for animals, etc.

Water sector has been divided into those concerned with "*domestic*" water supply (water for drinking, washing and maintenance of hygiene); "*productive*" water (mostly water for irrigated food production and also for large livestock); and the "*environmental*" water sector (concerned with flood coping mechanisms, drought mitigation, mangrove swamp management, river basin

management and so on) (Maheshvari and Pillai, 2001).

Gender analysis has highlighted women's triple labour burden-that (1) women take the primary responsibility for *reproductive work* (care of children, old people, household food, health and basic needs provision; (2) women are also heavily involved in *productive work*, such as farmers, cash laborers, or in other income-generating enterprises; and (3) women often also take on voluntary *community work*.

Division of labor in livelihood activities is based on gendered construction of social roles, which also means understanding gendered access to water resources implying that men and women have different priorities regarding accessing water. As discussed above it is important to involve women in designing water policies, it is important to understand how access to water is linked to access to other resources, among the most critical of these are land, money and labour.

Women's Voices and Actions :

National Commission for Women in its report on water and women (2005) states that while women carry the water burden as water providers, they are excluded from decisions about how water will be used, how it will be distributed, how it will be managed, how it will be owned. Within women their exist hierarchies according to their caste background which plays a key role to their public visibility in the maintenance of the water retraining structure. While emphasizing women's roles as the bearers of water and the managers of household water may have served to reinforce gender-inequitable divisions of domestic labor. To further goals of equality, gender sensitivity should be combined with wider social analysis and an appreciation of other power dimensions in communities. The conventions and hierarchies that determine men's and women's position in the family, community and society at large, which often leads to the subordination of women.

The giant and forceful voices in this area (water and women) are still missing. By the 1970s, women in several parts of the world had started actively organizing to stop degradation of their water systems because the development discourse seemed insensitive towards it and increases the burden of women especially of those belonging to rural background of the country. Still thousands of villages are without proper water supply and scores of villages are tanker fed reflecting people's waiting for water, struggle, manpower and daily labour to collect water.

The World's Women summit of the United Nation in 2010 reports that more women have remained poor, continue to receive minimal pay for their labor, if not totally remain unpaid, and rely mostly on natural resources in their immediate environment for food, sustenance and livelihood, while taking on time-consuming and hazardous household labor for their families, such as water and firewood collection. The report further states that Women are assigned the chore of fetching and collecting water, as data in 38 out of 48 countries included in the study show that there are more adult women in households responsible for acquiring the family's drinking water supply than adult men. Girls under the age of 15 are also more likely than boys of the same age to be in charge of water collection (Quentin and Hussey, 2011).

The discussion in the context of water management policies over the past decades, especially the realization that improved water management cannot be achieved by technical means alone and the consequent shift towards a recognition of the role of women as water users and managers. This has, however, led to the assumption that involving women in decision -making and in operation and maintenance of water supplies ensures more equitable outcomes. Quentin and Hussey (2011) argue the complexity of gendered water relations and the tenacity of social barriers that perpetuate unequal access and benefits. The gendered analysis of the role of women in managing water

resources offers some examples of providing directions in overcoming inequalities and have laid the foundation for the various options to change the plight of women. Since the 1980s there has a growing awareness about gender concerns, emphasis given to welfare, efficiency and empowerment has been encapsulated in Women in development, (WID) approach. From the mid 2000 the focus shifted to ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of water supply delivery and management, there has been an increasing policy emphasis on integrated water management to achieve overall goals of poverty alleviation, economic growth, and environmental sustainability. Gender specialists argue that a focus on women as managers of water isolated from their broader gender social relation will not deliver desired results, its conventional wisdom that gender should be 'mainstreamed 'into development approaches. Momsen (2011*)* has clearly shown that gender differences in distribution of water, women who are likely to be the heavy users of water showing the least information on the system of distribution of water. The availability of pure drinking water may also be problem in non-tropical countries, especially in part communist countries, where pollution and decaying infrastructure are widespread.

Until recently, water resources were considered unlimited and obtainable for free or far only a nominated sum. Laurie (2008) argues the water problems such as privatization of contented masculine subjectivities. Markets are gendered, what and where water is brought or sold, or the fetching and carrying of water is paid far, gendered values become prominent. However, these requirements can further marginalize disadvantaged people because gender inequality here interacts with poverty to double the burden on some water access. Women are often most immediately affected by these changes because of their household responsibilities involving water and their role as caregivers for the sick in the family.

Water Management Policy :

Water is a state subject and policies are framed at the national level in India. The four major users of water in India are agriculture, domestic use, and industry and power generation. The water allocation between varying demands for water by different users have tended to ignore the underlying conflicts and have, therefore, intensified the problems of inequalities and improper distribution. About 84 per cent of the water is estimated to be used in agriculture. Though India is one of the wettest countries in the world in terms of average annual rainfall, yet there are problems of distribution both spatially and temporally with wide variations. The annual utilization for water resources for India are estimated to be 1,140 cu Km out of a total available flow of about 1.880 cu Km. thus country, uses only one- tenth of its annual rainfall. There is a higher demand than supply of water, which is causing inter-sectorial and inter-regional conflicts, and diversion of water from drinking, purposes to irrigation, or from agriculture and domestic sectors to industry. Drinking water has always been on top of the priority list of social consumption items, because it is not only essential but also scarce. Keeping this in view, the 7th plan aimed at providing safe drinking water to all sections of the population. The objective of providing drinking water to all sections of people itself was not fulfilled let alone increasing the norm – for instance, only 72% urban people get safe drinking water and the coverage of poor is still lower at 66%. Accessibility of water seen in terms of quality of water, *i.e.*, taps, hand pumps, and tube wells, wells, etc. Tap water is the safest and easiest source of water available in the country. The scale of social consumption and its distribution across different sections of the society plays a vital role in human capital development. The basic items of social consumption basket include drinking water, sanitation and medical, education facilities, environment protection, Kathleen O'Reilly (2006) highlights the connections made between women

and water in a Rajasthan drinking water supply project as a significant part of drinking water's commodification. For development policy makers, water progressing from something free to something valued by price is inevitable when moving economies toward modernity and development. Kathleen further indicates that water is not commoditized simply by charging money for it, but through a series of discourses and acts that link it to other "modern" objects and gives it value. One of these objects is "women", through women's participation, activities that link gender and modernity to new responsibilities and increased mobility for village women involving the clean water supply, a "traditional" Rajasthani woman becomes "modern". Water, in parallel, becomes "new", "improved" and worth paying for. Women and water resources are further connected through project staff's efforts to promote latrines by targeting women as their primary users. The research shows that villagers applied their own meanings to latrines, some of which barred women using them. This paper fills a gap in feminist political ecology, which often overlooks how gender is created through natural resource interventions, by concerning itself with how new meanings of "water" and "women" are mutually constructed. It contributes to critical development geography literatures by demonstrating that women's participation approaches to natural resource development act as both constraints and opportunities for village constituents. It examines an under-explored area of gender and water research by tracing triangular relationship between development and women through access to water.

It is argued that through women's participation activities that link gender and modernity to new responsibilities (e.g., serving on village water committees) and increased mobility (e.g., attending public meetings) for village women involving the clean water supply,

Village women in the Chipko movement in India held on to the water-saving capacity of their forests by opposing felling by contractors. Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement), also in India, has struggled for years to stop the damming of the Narmada River. Women, under the leadership of Ms. Medha Patkar, are in the forefront of the Movement. Although the submergence of villages has started, the crusade for justice continues. In Cameroon, women withheld their labour in an irrigated rice project as they were not assigned land but were expected to work in their husbands' fields.

Women as Agency of Preserving Natural Resources :

Since the 1970s, when women's gendered roles and experiences began to be recognized by mainstream development policy makers, women's participation in drinking water supply has encompassed a range of approaches. In northern Rajasthan the collection of water, household cleaning and children's hygiene are the responsibility of the women and girls of a household (with some exceptions). A look into the project's *Handbook on Women's Participation* indicates that village women's mobilization was based on domestic, traditional roles, which were extended to include public activities pertaining to water. A "traditional" Rajasthani woman becomes "modern". **'***Gavoon main Paani Aajaye'* (Village should get water supply) is still a big slogan and dream of a plethora of villagers especially women. It has been seen that even women enter politics or contest Panchayati elections to address the water issue. At the global level, it is recognized that women's basic need is having access to an improved, convenient, reliable and safe source of water close to their home. With a focus on this aspect, community water supply programmes (CWSP) have been initiated throughout the developing world, aiming at providing women with improved water supply technologies (Kathleen O'Reilly, 2006).

Women's participation meant building modern relationships between women and water in

their homes (e.g., covering water pots; teaching kids' water-based hygiene) and empowered relationships outside the home (e.g., speaking in front of men in public forum). Ecofeminism, most closely associated with the work of Vandana Shiva (1988), essentialisms women as a group, arguing that, because they are female, women have a unique knowledge about the environment and are "natural" protectors of natural resources. Singh *et al.* (2004), argues that women are the domestic water managers, the strategic need of women has been identified as having access to domestic water sources that are convenient, reliable and located close to home. The need has been addressed through installation of low cost improved water supply systems in different parts of the developing world.

While the need of women as domestic water managers has been globally articulated and addressed, perhaps adequate attention has not been drawn to the fact that this role is actually performed within the context of local communities where domestic water management activities are built upon the users' perceived needs to be fulfilled through culturally appropriate means. How do cultural intricacies in local communities influence the water fetching behavior of women? What is the impact of such factors on the adoption and utilization of modern domestic water supply systems? The paper explores the implications of local cultural realities for the effectiveness of hand pump as a modern domestic water supply system arguing that the locally perceived water needs of women are holistic and fail to be adequately addressed through the new source. Consequently, it has been admitted only as and add on' source, thereby hindering achievement of the basic objective of bringing women greater comfort, better health and socio-economic empowerment.

Community water supply programmes are seen as instrumental in achieving the goal of 'safe' water for all. Women, a principal target group of these programmes, are to be benefited with greater convenience, enhance socio-cultural opportunities and better health for themselves and their families, provided through improved water facilities. Water supply programmes largely consist of three essential components, namely: technology, people and institutions. Although such programmes are intended to benefit women members of local communities, scant attention is paid to the impacts of the socio-cultural context of the community on these programmes. This article explores the influence of social and cultural intricacies on the implementation of community water supply programmes, and assesses their effectiveness. The article offers important lessons for the design and implementation of this type of programme. It concludes that the local socio-cultural context sets the stage for program. Implementation, being a dynamic factor that determines actual access to water sources, more so than mere physical availability, which is often used as a criterion for program performance. There is urgent need to integrate socio-cultural factors as a fourth dimension in designing community water supply programmes and suggests practical measures for enhancing the effectiveness of such programmes.

In 1997 MOMA-86 initiated a drinking water campaign. This campaign aimed to find solution to drinking water problems at the local level through water quality monitoring raising public awareness on water and health problems, sustainable water management and environmental rights and promoting public participation in planning .In towns, the main drinking water problems are the low quality of the water and water shortage, because most of the water delivery system are worn out and depleting.

Conclusion :

Role of water be that water collection, management and use has a profound role in areas of women's lives, their health and social status. Amid the lack of right to safe drinking water and

hygiene, still a considerable section of the Indian populace is trapped in the water problems. Such a situation has multiple effects upon them and their living conditions. Problems of access to water at home are directly related to the issue of women empowerment and development. Both men and women perceive water and the associated labour to it differently in India and hardly any emphasis is given to the time and the physical effort involved by the women for water collection purely because the gender role allocation where the responsibility of collecting and managing water is the responsibility of women, howsoever difficult.

However the 11th plan not only focused on inclusive growth but also gender balancing. Subsequent focus was on issues like feminization of agriculture, menial employment and economic empowerment of the women from marginal and minority groups. This working paper is an effort to argue how water shapes gender relations and development/underdevelopment in the society, looking at water from a complex social perspective and how water is related to the local power plays a role in the family power structure. Water does not merely reveal gender relations in rural and urban India but reflects the developmental issues and concerns related to public life and amenities also.

In fact the labour market participation and dynamics of engagement of women both inside and outside their homes is still to be explored fully and understood in a proper perspective. Apart from women and water relation in urban context, the rural women's lives mostly revolve round water, be that at domestic level or in the agricultural field. A considerable portion of her out-going time goes in fetching water for most of her household chores revolve round the need for water. A survey reveals that a rural woman in India almost travels 1400 kilometers a year to fetch water for her family. At policy level it is argued that the government should provide community drinking water supply systems. It is necessary that the community should assume the responsibility to maintain such assets on its own. In course of time it would be possible that even the additional capital costs for further expansion of the assets would be decided, managed and implemented by the community itself with limited intervention of the state. This is the best solution for sustainable development of common assets. The World Bank intended to push reforms in drinking water and environmental sector through this approach. Many projects are working for the development of water supply that needs to be executed timely to meet the water crisis. There are material and gender inequalities in access to water for drinking and cooking. Access to drinking water is primarily through ownership and common property modes. Market access, in the form of bottled water, has started in the last few years, but is not widely available in rural areas and is expensive. State-backed provision in rural areas has been limited to the provision of village hand pumps that, as noted, are often inoperable.

There is a dire need to involve women at all levels in making the community water supply programmes a real success. The immediate goal must be to provide women with access to improved, convenient, reliable and safe domestic water close to their residence, which is still to happen in the far-flung India. The Gender perspective needs to be incorporated into the plans of development interventions in the water sector. Development in water sector is needed because development intervention in the water sector may involve change in the lives of women, in culture. In this regard a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) can be a successful method of bringing in the perspectives of diverse groups within communities. The village mapping, use of census data and identification of the existing water sources and sanitation facilities can be conducted with both women and men. Though the State has been making efforts like Peyjal Yojana, (with a chain of sub-schemes at state levels) launched in the 10th five year plan (2002-2007) solely for the drinking water purpose in the water scarce areas, however there is a need of efficient water delivery system in the country. Similarly Swajal Dhara scheme was launched on 25th of September 2002 with the objective of

community participation and community based rural water supply aimed at empowerment and decision making of villagers, however water is still the major issue in most of the Indian villages and cities. Still much is to be done in terms of the rural empowerment especially women empowerment in the water sector.

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