Chapter 1

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

The present study aims to understand the participation of women in contemporary struggles in Maharashtra which address issues of environment. The two struggles examined in this study - the struggles against Special Economic Zones and against nuclear power plant (in Raigad and Ratnagiri districts respectively) illustrate the complex, intersecting concerns and trajectories of struggles or movements addressing environmental issues and peoples’ well-being. Importantly, they allow a feminist reading of women’s participation in such struggles, particularly in the contemporary Indian context marked by neoliberal development. The present chapter sets out the background to the study and discusses its aims and methodology.

Women and nature

Historically, women and men have had different roles in production in relation to the environment (Merchant 1990:1117-1118). In subsistence economies, production modes were such that women had a close linkage with nature; and this in turn created an impact on nature. In hunting gathering societies, women collect and process plants and small animals, eggs, and fish, as well as fabricate tools, baskets, mats and clothing. Men hunt larger animals, fish, construct weirs and hut frames, and burn forests and brush (ibid.). In cash economies and those influenced by the markets, women’s role as primary producers is likely to conflict with men’s role. This was apparent in the case of the Chipko movement of Uttarakhand. Women hugged trees and thus prevented the contractor’s men from cutting them. Even though commercialisation of agriculture has changed women’s role and their impact on nature, women continue to be traditional contributors to agricultural economy in many rural sites. In fact, with the advent of feminisation of agriculture, the role of women as land tillers and producers was strengthened; albeit without the benefit of land title.

The women-nature relationship exists on the canvas of property relations as well. Issues such as distribution and ownership of property and the way in which men and women are connected to their environment have gained importance. Agarwal (1996: 475) through her studies aptly describes this reality:
The gap between legal ownership rights and actual ownership is only one part of the story. The other part relates to the gap between ownership and effective control, again attributable to a mix of factors—male control over agricultural technology, especially the plough, and male bias in the dissemination of information and technological inputs disadvantage women farmers and increase their dependence on male relatives.

It is pointed out that women’s relation to environment is influenced by requirements of “sustenance” (Shiva 1988: 86-87). The studies in common property resources (CPR) reveal that women too use CPRs for fuelwood, fruits etc. for sale in the market.

Feminist scholars perceive three types of connections between women and nature. Marxist and socialist feminist literature analyses the relationship between economic structures and women’s assigned role and environmental hardships. Writings on ecofeminism acknowledge the connection between exploitation and degradation of women and nature (Mellor 1997:1). Rather than being a contrast to feminism, ecofeminism assumes a different character by combining feminism and environmentalism. While feminism associates itself with ‘liberation’, ‘emancipation’, or ‘self-determination’ and ‘modernism’ distinct from the ‘traditional images’ of women (Datar, 2011:1); feminist theorisation does not mention the category of ‘nature.’ The empirical fact is that the relationship between non-availability of food, fodder and fuel has led to women’s increased hardships. Such relations get validated by empirical research on the adverse impact of natural degradation on women’s lives.

**Ecofeminism**

The peace, feminist and ecology movements of the late 1970s and early 1980s formed the grounds for an imagination of the feminist perspective called ‘ecofeminism’. The term ‘ecofeminism’ itself was coined by a French writer Francoise d’Eaubonne in 1974 and further developed by Ynestra King in 1976.

Ecofeminism assumes a different character, not as a contrast to feminism but certainly as a combination of environmentalism and feminism. Although there are different strands of ecofeminism like cultural ecofeminism and radical ecofeminism, each strand firmly adheres to the view that ‘nature’ has to be made a category of analysis along with gender, race and class. Plumwood tried to develop a theoretical connection between environmental degradation and the continued devaluation of women’s reproductive activities (Plumwood 1993).

Ecofeminists draw a conceptual relationship between women and nature. Women are identified with body, earth, and their reproductive capacity. They are thought to have a particular relationship with nature by virtue of their biology (Buckingham 2004); and their proximity to nature has qualified them
to speak more eloquently on nature’s behalf (Spretnak 1989; Daly 1978). The third relationship is the epistemological, which follows from women’s association with nature. Since women are closer to nature, it may be deduced that they know more about its strengths and secrets. Women are considered as experts and therefore in a key position to suggest remedial measures for restoration of ecological imbalance. Women seem to generate more practical and ecological paradigms.

Ecofeminism has contributed substantially towards activist struggles and theorizing. The arguments in favour of ecofeminism rise from a material base and they are also in support of alternative models of development (Datar, 2011). Thus, although the struggles of Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) and Special Economic Zone (SEZ) differ in their purpose and scope, they do share a common linkage towards evolving alternative models of development and echo the need for livelihood and ecological preservation.

Wickramasinghe links the conceptual and practical aspects of ecofeminism in her work on South Asia, arguing that the region, particularly in this area has helped women conceptualise the links between women and environment. Inequalities such as the distribution of rural work have not necessarily been bridged by development but have been re-endorsed in newly created development paradigms (2003: 230).

The Indian ecofeminist, Vandana Shiva, a strong supporter of ecofeminist theory, argues from a socialist perspective. Shiva critiques modern science and technology as essentially patriarchal and colonial projects that are inherently violent and perpetuates this violence against women and nature.

Third world women are bringing the concern with living and survival back to centre-stage in human society. In recovering the chances for the survival of all life, they are laying the foundations for the recovery of the feminine principle in nature and society, and through it the recovery of the earth as sustainer and provider (Shiva 1989:224).

Shiva devoted her life to campaign against ecologically destructive ‘maldevelopment’ which is inherently a violation of nature and women:

This violence against nature and women is built into the very mode of perceiving both, and forms the basis of the current development paradigm (ibid, 1989: xvi).

In Shiva’s view, there is a denial of feminine principle in the current model of ‘development’. Lives of women and peasants, based on subsistence and rooted in certain sustaining values are sacrificed for profit-driven commercial production and trade. For her, the whole process of maldevelopment rests on the patriarchal assumptions of western culture. This is in contrast to the world view of women and non-westernised peoples. In the world-view of the Chipko women, for example, nature is Prakriti, which
both creates and is the source of wealth. Those who live in and derive sustenance from nature, such as rural women, peasants, and tribals, have a deep knowledge of nature’s processes of reproducing wealth (Shiva, 1989: 219). Shiva traces the linking of women with nature to the ancient literature and philosophical thought of Samkhya philosophy. Samkhya Darshan propagates dualism in terms of Purusa and Prakriti. Shiva identifies women with ‘prakriti’.

For Shiva and Maria Mies “an ecofeminist perspective propounds the need for a new cosmology and a new anthropology which recognises that life in nature...” (Shiva and Mies 1993:6). They combined affinity principle on women’s relationship with nature while recognizing women’s social experience: “Wherever women acted against ecological destruction or/and the threat of atomic annihilation, they immediately became aware of the connection between patriarchal violence against women, other people and nature. We have a deep and particular understanding of both through our nature and our experience as women” (ibid: 14).

The ecofeminist perspective is however, not free from criticism. The liberal and Marxist feminists question the very notion of the connection between women and nature as a relic of patriarchy. Complete identity between women and nature leads to a theoretical framework of biological determinism. Mellor (1997) says there is also over-romanticising of women and women’s history. She says that for asserting a ‘totalising’ image of universalised ‘woman,’ ecofeminists have ignored differences among women. Feminist scholars like Cecile Jackson (19935), Janet Biehl (1991), Meera Nanda (1991), and Bina Agarwal (1992) criticised ecofeminist perspectives as “ethnocentric, essentialist, blind to class, ethnicity and other differentiating cleavages, as historical and one that neglects the material sphere” (Jackson 1993: 398). Writings on ecofeminism acknowledge the historical exploitation and domination of women and nature and both are seen as victims of development. They consider this position as self-evident and self-explanatory, but the literature does not offer concrete evidence of such exploitation. Instead, “(They)...freeze women as merely caring and nurturing beings instead of expanding the full range of women’s potentialities and abilities” (Biehl 1991:15). She continues, “the use of metaphors of women as ‘nurturing’— like the earth as female abound are regressive rather than liberating to women” (ibid: 17-19). Such assertions about women-nature connections simply reinforce stereotypical images of womanhood. The implied homogeneous category of women “fails to differentiate women by class, race, ethnicity and so on” (Agarwal 1992:122). Critics like Susan Prentice (1988) point out that stressing the special relationship between women with nature and politics imply that what men do to earth is bad, unlike women, thereby ignoring the fact that men too can develop an ethic of caring for nature. It does not account for the role of capitalism and control over nature. Ecofeminists working within the socialist framework, look upon nature and human nature as “socially constructed, rooted in an analysis of race, class and gender” (Merchant 1992:194).
Ecofeminism and Feminist Environmentalism

As discussed in the previous sections, ecofeminism is based on the claim that there is a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women (Mellor 2007). Critics like Rosi Braidotti (1994) and Bina Agarwal (1998) argued that ecofeminism has focused too much on ideological arguments and failed to address power and economic differences which contribute to differentiation among women; and that ecofeminists also tend to overestimate the idea of harmonious, ecological, and traditional societies.

Bina Agarwal suggests the term ‘feminist environmentalism’ in place of ‘ecofeminism’. The perspective is rooted in material reality and sees the relationship between women and nature as structured by gender and class, organisation of production, reproduction and distribution. It avers that the connection between women and the environment is structured by the gender and class/caste/race organisation of production, reproduction and distribution (1992:119). She affirms that class-gender effects of environmental change are manifested as pressures on women’s time, their income, nutrition and health, their social support networks, and their knowledge. She notes, “Women, particularly in poor rural households are both victims of environmental degradation as well as active agents in the movements for the protection and regeneration of the environment.” (1992:119). This approach is similar to Dianne Rochelleau’s (1995) formulation of approach of ‘feminist political ecology’. This stream of thought enquiries about the role and place of women in environment development from a political lens.

Philosopher Karen Warren (1988) says: “Ecofeminism builds on the multiple perspectives of those whose perspectives are typically omitted or undervalued in dominant discourses. An ecofeminist perspective is thereby... structurally pluralistic; inclusivist and contextualist, emphasizing through concrete example of the crucial role context plays in understanding sexist and naturalist practice.”

In her book Ecofeminist Philosophy, Warren presents, ‘Ecofeminism’ as a general school of thought. She describes the family resemblances among diverse examples of ecofeminism. Warren argues that ‘something is a feminist issue if an understanding of it helps one understand the oppression, subordination, or domination of women’ (2000:1). She defends multi-cultural ethics, while clearly advocating specific transcultural values, such as justice and caring (Cuomo 2002).

Ecofeminism is an amalgamation of environmentalism, feminism, and women’s spiritual concern (Spretnak 1990). As the environment along with the environmental crisis raised the consciousness of women to the decay of earth, they began to see a parallel between the devaluation of earth and the devaluation of women. Women began to see the link not as a false construction of weakness, but as a strong unifying force that clarified the violation of women and the earth as part of the same drama of male control (King 1989). Ecofeminism has contributed substantially towards activist struggle and
theorising. The arguments in favour of ecofeminism arise from a material base and they are also in support of alternative models of development (Datar2011).

Environmental movements

Environmentalism as a growing concern for environmental issues is an international movement and has spread to almost all countries of the world. The initiation of this thought goes to USA and one can meaningfully ascribe the ethos created due to *Silent Spring* in the 1960s and also to 19th century ecologist Ellen Swallow. Swallow developed “Oekology” or science of environment. In 1962, Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring* provided the impetus to environmental sensitisation first in the US and then globally. Emergence of environmentalism as a social movement can be attributed to the publication of Carson’s book. Carson described the negative impact of chemical insecticides accumulating in the soil and tissues of living organisms. But environmentalism is not the child of 1960s rather, perhaps the grandchild of 1860s i.e., from the onset of industrial revolution. Industrial revolution altered the natural worlds and also created an impact on the cultural world of humans.

In 1972, United Nations held its first conference on the Human Environment at Stockholm, Sweden. Through this conference the environment agenda was floated on the world platform. In the same year, The Club of Rome, published “The Limits to Growth” which had a political impact. Both the reports of the Brandt Commission of 1980 and 1983 made an appeal for global cooperation to fight against food scarcity, and the elimination of hunger and malnutrition world over. In 1987, Norway published “Brundtland report” titled as “Our Common Future”. The phrase ‘sustainable development’ came into circulation after this report. The Rio conference in Brazil, in the year 1992 paved the way for ‘common concern’ over the misuse and degradation of environment by humans themselves.

The popular assumption among Western European and North American thinkers and the general public was that environmentalism is a phenomenon peculiar to rich nations alone. It implies that rich countries are considered for green philosophy only after achieving affluence and material growth. Unfortunately, the equation of affluence and environmentalism is based on an inadequate understanding of the data from such poor countries. Guha asserts that “data from developing countries shows growing environment constituency in societies such as Brazil, India, and Thailand, countries far-flung and richly varied (2000:99).”

Citing a few examples from third world countries may not be out of place here. Kenya’s Green Belt Movement, an indigenous initiative founded by Wangari Maathai is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that focuses on environmental conservation and development. Its core activity is a tree-planting campaign. The initiative involves local people and prefers to rely on local capacity; knowledge,
wisdom, and expertise wherever appropriate (Maathai, 2006:6). It is an effort in which local communities work together with “Harambee” approach.

People who have demonstrated their environmental concern have at times had to face prosecution and penalty. Wangari Maathai was beaten and imprisoned; Judi Bari, the chief of ‘Redwood Summer Protest’ was wounded by a bomb; Chico Mendes was murdered; poet-playwright Ken-Saro-Wiwa was killed in 1995 by the Nigerian government.

Environmentalism of the poor

The 1972 United Nations Conference on Human Environment at Stockholm provided the impulse for various studies and reports for India and many third world countries. They discussed the impact of environmental alterations on present and future generations. The Reports on the State of India’s Environment (five reports to date) were published and brought to the public domain by the Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment. Other important studies are on Chipko movement including Guha (1991); Shiva and Bandopadhyay (1988). Jain’s (1984) case study presenting women’s participation in Chipko movement and Bahuguna’s (Silyara,1983) book titled Walking with Chipko Message. Amita Baviskar (2012) studied Bhilala tribes of Madhya Pradesh and focused on tribal relationships with nature and their conflict with state induced ‘development’. Almost all national interest ventures are projected as being beneficial to the masses though they require some of the poor and marginalised to surrender their lands. She studied the development policy and performance of the state and contends:

The model of development established since independence has fundamentally altered the way in which different social groups use and have access to natural resources. The changes wrought by the independent state have created conflicts over competing claims to the environment…These claims are not merely for a greater share of the goods, but involve different ways of valuing and using nature - for profit or survival, or some combination of the two. They also involve different worldviews - one driven by the desire to dominate and exploit nature and humanity, the other moved by empathy and respect. Sometimes reverence for the two” (Baviskar 2012: 32-33).

International, regional, national and local women’s environment organisations have been established since the 1980s. They became important catalysts in empowering women and bringing a gender perspective in sustainable development. It is often through these organisations that women’s voices are speaking out against environmental destruction for a peaceful and a healthy planet. International groups such as the Women’s Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO) have followed the international development agenda closely and tried to influence it through their advocacy work. The Women’s Action Agenda for a Peaceful and Healthy Planet 2015 developed in preparation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 2002, adds a holistic perspective to the policy arena; with emphasis on the relationships between the global economic and political forces, the social arena, cultural aspects and ecological circumstances.
Since the early 1990s, particular thematic networks have been formed and developed in centres of expertise, such as the Gender and Water Alliance, ENERGIA (working on gender and sustainable energy), the Gender and Climate Change Network, Diverse Women for Diversity (working on gender and biodiversity). These groups are not only instrumental in promoting the integration of gender into specific sectors, but also in shaping the very nature and contents of policies.

Also, professional women’s organisations have been established, such as the Women Leaders for the Environment consisting of women environment ministers from around the world, and the recently established Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN). In November 2004 more than 150 professional women and activists came together in Nairobi for the first ‘WAVE conference: Women as the Voice for the Environment’, hosted by UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme).

**Making a case for an Indian environmentalism**

Indian environmentalism is supported by weaker sections of the society. They are tribals, forest dwellers, peasants, fisher-folk, women, hill residents etc. They are the carriers of environmental movement in India. This ‘environmentalism of poor’ was at times led by intelligentsia or middle-class urban groups. A large segment of what is currently known as environmental movements is, in fact, peasant struggles in defence of traditional rights over land, water and other resources wrapped in the robe of environmentalism--- a fact which Guha (1989) describes as a distinction between ‘private’ and ‘public’ faces of the Indian environmental movement.

**Chipko movement**

Recent origins of the Indian environmental movement can be fairly ascribed to the most celebrated of forest conflicts involving the Chipko movement of the central Himalayas. In April 1973, the peasants of Mandal, an interior village in the Garhwal Himalayas effectively thwarted commercial felling in a nearby forest by threatening to “hug the trees”. The hill peasantry had shown resentment to state forest policies which were favourable towards outside commercial contractors. The commercial interest was at the expense of the local people’s subsistence needs of food, fodder and small timber. Chipko is considered to be a representative of the wider spectrum of forest-based conflicts (Gadgil and Guha 1994). Because of its novel technique of embracing trees and Gandhian associations, it acquired worldwide recognition. Ramchandra Guha considers Chipko in its public face as an ‘environmental movement’, but in its private face, it is a peasant struggle. The takeover of the forest resources and their management either by government agencies or by commercial enterprises pose a threat to subsistence
rights of peasantry. In Tehri Garhwal, the peasants objected to interference of the state. Peasantry claimed to have the full and exclusive rights over forest.

**Appiko**

Appiko represents one of the forests based environmental movements in India. The movement took place in the Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka. This successful movement was initiated by influential spice garden farmers, largely Brahmins. The Bedthi project was under construction and prosperous land owners were about to have their land submerged.

Sheth stated that, ‘the Appiko movement succeeded in its three-fold objectives namely: - 1) protecting the forest cover, 2) regeneration of trees in the denuded land, and 3) utilising forest wealth with proper consideration to conservation of natural resources(1997: 222). The Appiko movement saved the basic sources of livelihood for the people, a notable example being, trees like bamboo useful for making handcrafted items which they could sell to earn a few rupees. It also saved medicinal trees for their use by the local people (ibid:222).

**Silent Valley Project**

Silent Valley was a hydro-electrical project in the state of Kerala. No human community was to be displaced by this 200 KW dam, but it involved submerging of one of the last surviving patches of rain forest in peninsular India. The protest was for saving 89 sq. km of rich biological treasures with vast expanses of tropical virgin forests on the green rolling hills.

The Kerala Sashtra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) launched the campaign to save Silent Valley. KSSP is a network of school teachers and local citizens that promotes environmentally sound scientific projects in the villages. According to Nepal Padam (2009:106) the central issue of the Silent Valley protest includes: protection of the tropical rain forest and maintenance of the ecological balance.

**Baliraja Dam Movement**

Baliraja dam was constructed with people’s participation in Khanapur taluka of the Sangli district of Maharashtra. Bajra and jawar were the main crops of the region. Soon they were replaced by sugarcane cultivation. The recurrent drought, resulting from the cumulative effect of factors like deforestation, scanty rainfall, changing cropping pattern and agricultural practices, depletion of groundwater due to excessive extraction, and loss of top-soil through erosion, severely affected the livelihood of the poor people. In the severe drought of 1971 in Maharashtra, it is estimated that nearly 30,000 people migrated
to Mumbai and other towns in search of employment. They were absorbed by textile mills in Mumbai. The lingering strike in the textile industries in Bombay reversed the migration towards the villages and was supported by Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) in 1980s. On 28 October, 1983 EGS labourers, activists of Shramik Mukti Dal and Peasants and Workers Party established a common platform called “Shoshit Shetkari Kashtakari Kamgar Mukti Sangharsh”. The dam was constructed on the banks of river Yerla in two villages namely Tandulwadi and Balwadi. A strong base for future struggle was made during 1983-1986. They had to fight a battle against indiscriminate sand mining in the river Yeral. Baliraja movement is an agitation against sand excavation and construction of the dam. It also stands for sharing the stored water among the households of Tandulwadi and Balwadi equitably (Rout 2012).

Narmada Bachao Andolan

Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) can be considered as the most popular environmental movement from the final decade of the 20th Century. It is a movement against the Narmada River Valley Project involving three states namely: Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. The project demands large scale displacement of tribal communities of Bhils, Gonds, and Bhilalas. Nepal (2009) points out that the Narmada Bachao Andolan has drawn upon a multiplicity of discourses of protests such as: displacement risks and resettlement provisions, environmental impact and sustainability issues, financial implications of the project, forceful evictions and violations of civil liberties, issues pertaining to river valley planning and management, implications of Western growth model, alternative development and appropriate technology and many more. The movement uses various tools of protest such as satyagraha, jalsamarpan, rastaroko, gaonbandh, demonstrations and rallies, hunger strikes, and blockade of projects (ibid:197).

In short, Indian environmentalism exhibits these features: concern for environment combined with concern for social justice; significant and determining role played by women; the Gandhian legacy of protest techniques of satyagraha, fasts, and moral vocabulary.

Ellen Swallow showed the direct connection between daily life and the environment (Hynes1985). The striking feature of environmentalism globally is participation of women. Many a time, roles played by women are ‘significant and determining’. They play a major role in making up the numbers at the morchas, dharnas and similar actions. They have often assumed the leadership roles as well. Some feminist scholars assumed this to be a mere mystical-bond between women and nature. Guha (2000:108) asserts that in the division of labour typical of most peasant, tribal and pastoralist households, it falls on women (and children) to gather fuel wood, collect water, and harvest edible plants. Moreover women, more than men, are perceptive enough to sense, for example, that eucalyptus
planted for industry might bring in some quick cash today but will undermine their economic security for days to come.

The Present Study

The main purpose of the current study is to explore women’s role in and contribution to environmental struggles. There are several reasons for a project such as this. The foremost objective is to fill elusive gaps between women present as participants and their motivations behind joining the struggle. The following section describes the sites of the study, its aims, purpose and objectives.

Two sites, two struggles

In the year 2006, forty-five villages of Raigad district in Maharashtra came under threat with the announcement of the setting up of a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) project by Jai Corporation, a company promoted by Reliance Industries. This project came to be commonly known as Maha Mumbai SEZ, or MMSEZ. Out of the 45 villages, 24 villages are from Pen tehsil, 20 villages from Uran tehsil and 1 from Panvel. The current study restricted its scope to the 24 villages of Pen tehsil. The advantage was the familiarity with region and language. The project was called off in the year 2011, after a General Referendum was conducted in the region for this project, at 6,199 people filed their opposition to the MMSEZ. Persistent efforts of protestors finally led the struggle to victory and it ended in 2011.

The other site of struggle under study was Jaitapur–Madban nuclear power project in Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra about 400 kms away from Mumbai. The Jaitapur Nuclear Power Project (JNPP) will occupy more than 968 hectares of land from five villages namely, Madban, Niveli, Karel, Mithgavane and Varliwada. It will affect the livelihoods of some 40,000 people, including farmers, horticulturists, fisherfolk, agricultural workers, loaders, transporters, traders, streetvendors, and providers of many other services (Bidwai 2011:10). Officials of National Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) have claimed this upcoming project to be one of the largest nuclear power projects in the world. It would be interesting to explore the impact on the community, occupations, ecology, economy and culture.

Both the struggles are from the Konkan region of Maharashtra. Raigad and Ratnagiri districts have peculiar geological features and have a long drawn social history and culture of struggles in pre and post-independent India. The people residing in these areas are heavily dependent on natural resources, namely land and water, for their survival. Raigad is famous for the fishing community of Kolis, and rice and salt producers called Agri. Raigad is popularly known as ‘Rice Bowl of India’ because of its plentiful production of rice, whereas Ratnagiri is internationally acclaimed for delicious Alphonso
mangoes and paddy cultivation. It has a characteristic geological identity in the laterite rock belt, is rich in flora and fauna and comes under an ecologically sensitive zone.

**Aim, Objectives and Methodology**

This study aims to explore and understand women’s participation in the Raigad Anti-SEZ struggle and Jaitapur Nuclear Power Project (JNPP). Participation is defined as an act of taking part in an activity or event. The participation of women in the struggles can be studied and understood in a variety of ways and by employing a variety of methods. The exploration is not limited to participation at the activity level alone but their vision for development, environment etc. is also studied.

The study was undertaken with the purpose of understanding women’s role and motives behind their participation through the narrative of two environmental movements namely, anti-SEZ movement from Raigad district and anti-nuclear power protest at Jaitapur from Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra. Both the struggles underline the theme of women’s participation. However, history being ‘his story’, has not always given enough recognition to women’s contribution towards such social changes and social struggles.

Through this research project, while accounting for the critique of the essentialist approach to the women—nature association, I aim to frame this in terms of struggles, and to understand the contribution of women to these two movements. The rationale was to build a narrative of the movements from a feminist perspective.

**Objectives**

- To study the nature of women’s participation in anti-SEZ movement and anti-nuclear power struggles
- To understand the influence of various factors on women’s participation and its impact on their lives
- To study women’s diverse understanding of ‘development’ embedded within concerns about environmental issues, and how these are articulated.

**Rationale of the study**

In this study, the larger attempt is to understand the ‘historical invisibility’ of the large numbers of women involved in various people’s movements. Such a study has acquired an urgency in academic
discourses of social movements and gender studies. The exploration of their participation also should be studied in terms of core issues related to their decision-making capabilities. Some of the questions this study raises are: What does participation in movements mean in the lives of these women? What changes did this participation bring to their lives, thinking and their position in society? Who motivated them? Were they only followers or did they also initiate action? It will also be interesting to understand whether the increase in the number of women as voters or aspiring candidates or even as elected leaders has failed to bring down over all subordination and marginalization of women. Studies on formal political participation of women have failed to answer the questions of women’s marginalisation and subordination in the political process, as well as women’s participation in the less formal spaces of struggles. This study is expected to throw some light on women’s political roles. Peter Custers (1987:ix) in the preface to his book *Women in the Tebhaga Uprising: Rural Poor Women and Revolutionary Leadership*, raises some pertinent questions for progressive movements all over the world today: “why does male dominance remain unbroken in spite of women’s demonstrated capacity to organise, struggle and lead?” Yet another reason that motivates a study such as this one would be to make an impact on the consciousness of contemporary readers, men and women. Annie Besant once said Anybody can do it, why should I? Anybody can do it, why not I? Between the two, lie centuries of social evolution” (*Samya Shakti*, 1984: vii). This could happen only when an examination of women’s participation in the struggles is done. It is largely believed that women’s presence in such struggles which have limited time and space is the outcome of women’s passivity in political actions. The study might be able to comment on how far this claim is true or false. Can we say that such struggles bound by limited space and time are examples of less conventional politics? Is there a relationship between women’s participation in movements, the material conditions of their existence and the ideology of gender?

These were the underlying concerns of the study, which were sought to be addressed by using qualitative methods. (Methodological details are discussed in Chapter 2)

**Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

*The movements studied in this research*

Movement, struggle and campaign are all the processes of bringing change. Common people are involved in all three processes. Yet they are different from one another. In a campaign, people’s involvement and mobilisation is around one issue. A campaign may be described as a process of mobilisation on a single issue, such as signature campaign, lobbying, courting arrest etc. (Datar1989:22). The goal is immediate and the process ends when it is achieved.

Struggle involves opposition to the existing status of the group of people. It implies resistance to change. This resistance could be expressed through militant actions which might last for longer period of time.
A struggle can also be a spontaneous reaction to an immediate injustice. It need not represent planned action with a long-term perspective (ibid). A movement is inclusive of struggle and campaign with a long-term perspective, vision and a definite ideology to guide its course. It involves the masses and not just a few activists (ibid).

It should be noted that in the present study, namely anti-SEZ and anti-JNPP contexts, the term struggle is considered as equivalent to movement. The three terms namely, movement, struggle and campaign are considered equivocal and used interchangeably. The struggles under study have features of ecological movement as well as constitute the elements of social movement. In both the struggles the collective actions of a section of a society are clearly visible and through these collective actions people are protesting against change to safeguard their livelihood and survival.

The struggles under study are considered as social because these are deliberate collective endeavours to prevent change which is likely to occur within their surroundings. These two are indicative of some informal organisation of people, which comes as a consequence of development of consciousness and concretization. They are environmental too as there is concern for environment along with that for social justice.

These two struggles have emerged from an initial feeling of distrust, lack of confidence and discomfort among the people. They have been led by local nongovernmental organisations such as Sarvahara, Shramik Kranti Sanghatana, Sakav and many more in case of anti SEZ, and not led by any charismatic personalities. The villagers later formed their own platform called “Chovis Gaon SEZ Virodhi Sangharsha Samiti”. The anti- JNPP protests were led by Konkan Bachao Samiti, Janhit Seva Samiti, Jaitapur-Madban Panchkroshi Samiti.

These two struggles under study are environmental in nature. Considering the contents of Indian environmentalism as described by Gadgil and Guha (1994; 1998), both these struggles carry the crusade of Indian environmentalism. They are the struggles of the ‘poor’ who will become ecological refugees, in case they are not able to prevent the likely changes emerging in the form of Special Economic Zones or the Nuclear Power Projects. Human-nature relationship is central to environmental movements. Gadgil and Guha define the environmental movement “as organised social activity consciously directed towards promoting sustainable use of natural resources, halting environmental degradation or bringing about environmental restoration” (1989:455).

Harsh Sethi (1993) offers the classification of environmental struggles into three categories rooted in their varied ideological approaches to environmental issues. Firstly, these struggles operate in the realm of political economy, which brings into the debate issues of rights and the distribution of resources. Such struggles seek legal and policy-based shifts in the pattern of resource use. Secondly, they are often a response to environmental problems, and seek solutions within existing socio-economic
and technological frameworks. Thirdly, certain environmental movements reject dominant development paradigms, seeking a reconceptualisation of the human-nature relationship.

**Women’s participation**

When the movement becomes the locus of the study, obviously the common goal of the struggle or the movement becomes significant and so also the modus operandi, thus putting all the supporters and contributors into the back drop of the struggle. When the focus is on each of the contributory factors, say women here, the story takes a different shape and the new version of reality comes to the forefront. The defence for multiple, constructed and holistic realities is very aptly stated in Lincoln and Guba (1985:37) Baviskar (2012:3) reiterates that “As there are multiple realities constructed by people in different ontological positions; inquiry into these multiple realities does not seek to discover a unified truth but is aimed at enriching our understanding of divergent, socially situated truth. (1985: 37-42)”. This study is not a historical research. It intends to collect the data which would throw light on women’s contribution. A historian needs first-hand information to construct ‘history’. The ‘subaltern history’\(^1\) has made its mark in the 20\(^{th}\) century theory of knowledge, women’s perspective and their levels of participation. In the anti SEZ struggle, the study has captured the women’s narratives about their thoughts and actions, the philosophy behind their living, the pain and suffering they undergo in their day-to-day living. A solid base will be provided by the narratives for documenting this history in future. Narratives or oral history provide information which is rarely captured in the written documents, such as newspapers and reports.

This women’s activism in the struggles is attempted through open ended, in-depth interviews. The interview narratives are re-read for the themes. The emergent themes of process of women’s participation, nature of participation and the like, throw light on the survival motives behind activism. It further implies that women’s participation is a conscious process. Generally, women’s role and activism are expected to be in tune with social conformity. In this study, I observed that after closure of struggles the women go back to their usual roles and duties. However, during the struggle, they throw away the conformity pressures of ‘good woman’; ‘nice daughter’; ‘ideal mother or wife’, and freely assume new responsibilities in the process of change.

\(^1\) Subaltern history is capable of extension to any subordinated population. It is the project of bringing the experience of subordinated people into history.

Social Movements: Theory and Praxis in the Indian context

The concepts of new social and environmental movements are to be understood clearly for the purpose of this study. The struggles under consideration, viz. anti-SEZ and anti-JNPP necessitate a review of literature pertaining to SEZ (Special Economic Zone) as an economic concept as well as the nuclear debate.

Social movements are conceived as deliberate collective endeavours to initiate change (Wilkinson 1971). This change can be in any direction and may not exclude negative ways like violence and illegality says Wilkinson. Traditionally, social movements are considered as a systematic and well thought out collective mobilisation of people. Paul Wilkinson provided the working concept for social movements: “A social movement is a deliberate collective endeavour to promote change in any direction and by any means, not excluding violence, illegality, revolution or withdrawal into ‘utopian’ community. Social movements are thus clearly different from historical movements, tendencies or trends” (1971: 15). In addition, they could be incremental, unconventional and transformatory (Mukherji 1977). Oommen (1977) states that they provide space for confluence between old and new structures and values. They are unlikely to have any stable character and bear varying relations to other political, social institutions and practices (Thomas, 1996).

There is no single consensus definition of social movement (Opp 2009). The emergence of social movements can be attributed to inequality and insecurity (Oommen 1977). They are dynamic and historical phenomena and shaped by circumstances (Dutting and Sogge 2010:31). David Mayer and Sidney Tarrow (1998) describe the current human society as “social movement society”. Their idea of social movements suggests social movements to be a perpetual element in modern life rather than being sporadic in nature. They are not universal but a historical way of mounting claims. Social activism has emerged in the forms of institutionalisation and professionalisation.

Social movements were initially looked upon as unbounded crowd or social disturbance. However, they are rooted in the ideas that have emerged out of French as well as Russian revolutions. The set of values which we received from the French Revolution in terms of liberty, fraternity and equality is the core of all old and new social movements. These new movements are indebted to the Russian Revolution as well. Implementing socialist philosophy for bridging the gap between haves and have-nots was institutionalised through the Russian model of Communism. In the 20th century social movements were mass movements or people’s mobilisation intervening in exploitative social and political systems (George Rude, 1959).

Social Movement Theory is an interdisciplinary study within the social sciences that generally seeks to explain why social mobilisation occurs, the forms under which it manifests, as well as potential social, cultural, and political consequences.

Shah (2004) offers critical examination of social movements that helps in developing an understanding of major trends in different movements. In the Indian context, the concept of ‘social movement’ is not defined systematically (Chandra 1977). Raka Ray and Mary Katzenstein (2006) provide a comprehensive understanding of social movements in India. It throws light on the inception of social movements even before India’s independence in 1947. It also charts the changing pattern of social mobilisation in today’s context. The book views poverty reduction as one of the foci of mobilisation and highlights the need to club it with other issues and identities.

From the above explication, we know that there is no fixed definition of a social movement. It is understood in a very broad way. Such an understanding informs the current study on the social movements of anti-SEZ from Raigad and anti-JNPP from Jaitapur.

**New Social Movements**

New social movements claim to depart significantly from the conventional social movement paradigm. These movements are the result of some issues of ‘post-modern’ society (Singh 2001). Buechler cautiously defined the term ‘New Social Movements’ as “a diverse array of collective actions that have presumably displaced the old social movement of proletarian revolution associated with classical Marxism” (Buechler 1995: 442). According to Habermas, “new social movements are the ‘new politics’ which relate to quality of life, individual self-realisation and human rights whereas the ‘old politics’ focus on economic, political and military security” (Charles, 2002). Thus, it can be gathered from the available literature that a singular approach towards New Social Movement Theory is difficult to adopt.

The new social movements have “gained wide currency among theorists sympathetic to peace, feminist, ecological and local autonomy movements proliferating in the West since the mid-seventies” (Cohen 1985:663). It has also been argued that these movements are often responses to newer forms of social control, pressures to conform and information processing; in other words, the outcome of conflicts integral to everyday contemporary life. The sociological discourse initiates the debate over the ‘newness’ of these movements and in what way they differ from the old movements. Some thinkers like Plotke (1990) argue that the movements are new in the way that they project their goals as cultural. Sidney Tarrow (1991) states that they are not really new as they have grown out of pre-existing organisations and have long histories that are obscured by new social movement discourse.

On the other hand, thinkers like Russell J Dalton; Manfred Kuechler and Wilhelm Burklin (1990) are of the opinion that these movements are new in their advocacy of new social paradigms. For Claus Offe (1990) the movements are new as they lack a positive alternative and specific target in the form of a privileged class. Klaus Eder (1993) holds the view that they are inherently modern as they provide a
“cultural model and moral order that both defends normative standards against the strategic, utilitarian, and instrumental goal seeking and decision making of elites and points in the direction of a more democratic formulation of collective needs and wants within society.”

**Subaltern Movements**

New social movements emerged in post-colonial India when nation building was controlled by the influential classes to serve their interests (Chatterjee 1993; Frankel 2005; Kaviraj 1997) The changing political terrain is (Nigam and Menon 2007; Nilsen 2010) visible through subaltern movements that initially emerged in full force across many parts of India beginning in the 1960s (Desai 2016: 5). These subaltern movements are termed alternatively as the new social movements (Omvedt 1993) or non-party political formations (Kothari 1984).

Many popular protests have occurred at many different levels. These protests have had several different objectives. Among these new popular movements, the theme of human-nature relationship is central to environmental movements (Shah 2004:252). The Bishnoi movement and Mulshi *satyagraha* of 1921, Chipko in 1973, Appiko from Uttar Kannada, Silent Valley from Kerala (1985) and Narmada Bachao Andolan 1991 from Gujrat, MP and Maharashtra, are some of the examples of environmental movements in India. All these movements have been ultimately unified by its attempt to decentralize power into the hands of the exploited majority so that they have more control over their lives (Baviskar 2012: 38). Emergence of environmental movements in India are attributed to i) control over natural resources ii) faulty development policies of the government iii) socio-economic reasons iv) environmental degradation/destruction and v) spread of environmental awareness and media (Sharma 2007). It would be interesting to evaluate the two struggles used in the current study in terms of their resistance aimed at protecting the natural resources and their livelihood rights.

**Special Economic Zones**

Several books and factsheets furnish information and details about definition of SEZ; evolution of SEZ as a policy, aims and objectives of the SEZ (Das, 2009; Agarwal, 2014). Agarwal (2014) examines the effects of SEZs in India and makes valuable policy recommendations presenting SEZ in a positive perspective.

However, there is a large body of scholarship that describes the ill effects of SEZs in India pertaining to loss of livelihoods, displacement, land acquisition and compensation issues (Sathe 2014). Ian Cook, Ramchandra Bhatta and Dinker (2013: 45) analyses three different types of displacement namely social, cultural and economic with reference to lives of three women and their families getting affected
due to creation of Manglore Special Economic Zone and, consider these displacements as fundamentally rhythmic in nature. The impact of globalisation on indigenous people is examined by Nithya N. R. (2014). She critically examines the plight of tribals in the context of liberalisation and globalisation policies. Tribal zones are worst affected due to developmental projects. However, in the case of Raigad anti-SEZ struggle under study, not tribals but farm land owners have had to surrender their lands in the name of development.

Some authors have written extensively about Raigad SEZs (Mujumdar and Menezes 2012; Kale 2010). Though SEZs are looked upon as engines of progress the question it raises is whether it leads to ‘balanced development’ (Mujumdar and Menezes 2012). In case of Raigad SEZ, there was selective unmapping of territory and population, and asymmetry of information (ibid). As the space is produced by claiming agricultural land, SEZs create controversies related to displacement and livelihood (Sampat, P. 2010)

The literature on the anti-SEZ movement in Maharashtra and elsewhere in India do not discuss women’s roles in these struggles. There is common understanding and mention of women’s presence, but no in-depth information about their motives and nature of participation. The present study seeks to fill this gap.

Anti-Nuclear Power Plant Struggles

Manu Mathai’s article, ‘Nuclear Power at what cost?’ (2006) throws light on the ongoing contests in India over the future of nuclear power. The ongoing discussions are centred on vital points such as safety of nuclear plants, impact of radiation on human health and the lack of transparency of the nuclear establishment. The author believes rational decision regarding nuclear power plants could be within reach, only if everyone had access to and was able to understand the science of nuclear energy.

Praful Bidawi’s report, ‘People vs. Nuclear Power in Jaitapur, Maharashtra presents popular concerns about the environment, safety, livelihood and governance issues due to the project and assesses violations of civil liberties by the state. The editorial from Economic and Political Weekly (Volume 46, issue no. 18, 30 April 2011), ‘People’s Struggles vs. Political Opportunism’ voices people’s concerns for movement. It states that the struggle is hijacked for narrow political ends. People are concerned about the safety of nuclear power plants; and their resistance to forcible land acquisition. The editorial concludes that the people’s struggle will not die down and the reason for this is rooted in the history of past struggles in Konkan. People’s struggle against Sterlite Industries is still remembered in the area. I have also reviewed published press notes, press releases and grey literature from organisations working near Jaitapur like Konkan Bachhao Samiti and Jan Hakka Seva Samiti. These local publications
enhanced my understanding of the various political, socio-economic, environmental and genetic threats in case of nuclear power.

Helen Caldicott critiques the popular myths about nuclear power in her books *Nuclear Power is not the Answer* (2008) and *Nuclear Madness* (1979, 1994). She has identified certain consequences such as high expenditure, global warming, shortage of uranium etc. that would be created due to the nuclear industry’s expansion.

Sulabha Brahme’s, *AnuUrja: Bhram, Vastavani Paryay* (2011) and handbill, ‘*Pardafash: Jaitapur Anuprakalapacha ani Shaskiya Thaksenancha*’ offers an overview of nuclear power and nuclear power policy and presents JNPP in the midst of this. It also offers various alternatives to nuclear power. The discussion regarding India’s nuclear programme provides insights into the global politics over nuclear policy. Another publication by Pune based group of social activists, ‘*Lokayat*, ‘Unite, to fight Nuclear Madness’ (2011) offers detailed description of what is nuclear energy and its generation techniques. Claims of its safety and cleanliness are refuted substantially.

Women’s role in anti-nuclear movements across the globe is considered as important; with the exception of few studies like ‘*No Echoes Koodankulam,*’ where women’s active participation is explored. Women are against making the choice of nuclear energy as in various capacities like as a researcher say, Helen Coldicott and against nuclear armaments and warfare like the Women’s Peace Camp (1981-2000), popularly known as, Greenham Commons, but their contribution is assessed from the point of view of the struggle.

Indian environmentalism exhibits feature such as concern for environment combined with concern for social justice; significant and determining role played by women; the Gandhian legacy of protest techniques of satyagraha, fasts, and moral vocabulary. Throughout these studies though women’s presence is seen, very little attention is paid in addressing the role of women in detail.

**Women in popular movements**

Governments and policymakers in many countries became conscious of the connections between environment and gender in the decade of the 80s. The sensitivity was shaped by Ester Boserup’s book titled *Woman’s Role in Economic Development* published in 1970s. The policy makers started considering changes in connection with natural resource management and the specific role played by women in conservation. According to World Bank in 1991, “women play an essential role in the management of natural resources including soil, water, forests and energy and often have a profound traditional and contemporary knowledge of the natural world around them”.

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3https://www.gdrc.org/gender/gender-and-envi.html retrieved on December 23, 2018
was shown regarding the connectivity between women and environment, and also the ill effects of environmental degradation on their health. The gender, development and environment debate was acknowledged by United Nations documents and policies of the period. The connections between feminism, militarisation, healing and ecology were explored at the first conference held at University of Massachusetts, Amherst in 1980.

**UNCED Agenda 21**

Women’s concern for sustainable development was integrated in the United Nations Agenda 21. The platform was created at UN Rio conference in 1992. Agenda 21 is a non-binding action plan of the UN with regard to sustainable development. The agenda was to combat environmental damage, poverty and diseases, and aimed to achieve sustainable development. Chapter 24 of Agenda 21 is titled as Global Action for Women towards Sustainable and Equitable Development. Out of its eight objectives, the second objective focuses on increasing women’s proportion as decision makers, planners, technical advisers, managers and extension workers in environment and development fields.

Debates over women’s role and participation in popular movements are filled with questions regarding organisation and leadership in the forefront as women are generally marginalized in terms of representation and leadership (Desai 2016:13). Similarly, the nature of struggles, mobilising strategies, ideological perceptions and perspectives on micro issues in relation to larger political processes are equally stimulating.

Manimala’s (1983) report on Bodhgaya struggle in *Manushi* (1983) explores male activists’ views on women’s participation. The fact that women also should be developed as independent identities was never considered important by Vahini men. Ingrid Mendonca’s paper “Women in the Land Struggle: The experience of Ramegaon Village in Maharashtra (1983)” throws light on women’s agency. The government owned grazing land was collectively cultivated by 33 Dalit families in the villages near Latur. They had to face stiff resistance, especially from higher caste men who went to the extent of beating up the Dalit man and women. But Mendonca says women were very assertive and ready to face the challenge. She states, “the dalit women of Ramegaon have organized themselves, and have become militantly united to improve their status in society first as women and second as dalits. The story of these women is the story of women struggling to be in control of their lives” (ibid:23).

Ilina Sen’s *A Space within the Struggle* (1990) examines women’s presence and role in mass movements. Women’s presence in large numbers does not ensure awareness regarding women specific demands. The policy makers and governments of many countries became conscious of the connections between environment and gender in the decade of the 80s. The sensitivity was shaped by Ester
Boserup’s book entitled *Woman’s Role in Economic Development* published in the 1970s. The policy makers started considering changes in connection with natural resource management and the specific role played by women in conservation.

Similarly, the first conference to establish a connection between nature and women was held at University of Massachusetts, Amherst in 1980s. At this conference the connections between feminism, militarisation, healing and ecology were explored. Ynestra King wrote: “ecofeminism is about connectedness and wholeness of theory and practice. It asserts the special strength and integrity of every living thing… We are a woman-identified movement and we believe we have special work to do in these imperilled times. We see the devastation of the earth and her beings by the corporate warriors, and the threat of nuclear annihilation by the military warriors, as feminist concerns” (in Mies and Shiva 1993: 14).

The journey of women’s participation is through mobilisation indeed. But does this mobilisation subsequently lead to organisation? “The same women who go miles for *morchas* and demonstrations may be unavailable for meetings because it is their time to cook,” says Omvedt (Omvedt and Rao 1988:69). Omvedt suggests that as a movement subsides there is no opportunity for a true political role. She explains it by narrating women’s role in the Tebhaga and Telangana struggles. These women who fought so boldly against landlords and political forces were confined to personal spaces of their homes after the struggle as male comrades no longer provided them the opportunity for a true political role. One such attempt to organize rural women’s movement was made at Sangli district from Maharashtra under *Mukti Sangharash Samiti* (ibid).

**Women’s role in ecological struggles**

Women’s role in ecological struggles and debates since the nineteenth century has been ‘hidden from history’ (Rowbotham 1973). Rachel Carson through *Silent Spring* (1962) brought to light the harmful effects of insecticides and pesticides on human health and Barbara Ward offered a critique of western technology and came up with the idea of ‘spaceship earth’ in 1966. They were expressing concerns about the ecological degradation within their communities and put ecological questions on the national and international agenda. Yet in the North, the grassroots campaigning over the ownership and control of environment has taken on the ‘men of reason’ (Epstein, 1993). Women’s hardships due to commercial farming, logging and mining pose a threat to traditional ways of life. They also create several health hazards to women in the South (Mitter 1986; Mies 1986; Sen and Grown 1987; Shiva 1989). Grassroots level struggles like Chipko in the villages of Himalayas, the Green-belt Movement from Kenya, and the Love Canal Campaign from United States reveal women’s relationship to environment (Shiva, 1989:67).
The most celebrated first environmental movement from India, i.e. ‘Chipko’ marked a significant participation of women. It is believed to have emerged as a spontaneous action of women preserving trees (Sontheimer 1991; Ekins 1992); however, the movement has a strong political base (Mellor 1997: 18). The studies focused on the Chipko movement have alternated between asserting women’s natural affinities with ‘nature’, or relegating them to the background of a larger confrontation involving the interests of logging corporations and the state, in which a handful of men were prominent spokespersons (Haigh 1988; Bandyopadhaya 1988; Rangan 2000a; Linkenbach, 2007). Commercial pine or eucalyptus plantations provided some work to villagers but such plantations did not meet the needs of women who were involved in cultivation and dependent on trees for fuel and fodder for animals (Shiva 1989; Jain 1991).

High profile environmental movements from the plains and mountains and especially women’s role in these movements have captured the attention of people and the media. Medha Patkar, for example, came to symbolise the movement against the Sardar Sarovar hydroelectric project on the Narmada river (Fisher 1995). The NBA received more international attention than tribal women’s efforts to sustain the struggle, which in turn is indicative of challenges creating truly representational politics (Baviskar 2012). Except for these studies, it can be seen that very little attention is paid in addressing the extensive role of women in these struggles.

A common link to all these struggles is the participation of women. This could be explained by what Gail Omvedt points out in a paper ‘Women and Environment: Themes for Discussion’. In this paper, Gail Omvedt points out women and environment as a perspective rather than a problem area (Omvedt ‘nd’: 4). Plumwood tried to develop a theoretical linkage between environmental degradation and the continued devaluation of women’s reproductive activities (Plumwood 1993:1). Wickramasinghe (2003:230) links the conceptual and practical aspects of ecofeminism in her work on South Asia arguing that the region has helped women conceptualise the links between women and environment.

Vandana Shiva (1988) notes how the degradation of nature is closely linked with the deterioration of women’s lives. She states, “Women are devalued first, because their work cooperates with nature’s process, and second, because work which satisfies needs and ensures sustenance is devalued in general”, (1988:7) Mies and Shiva (1993) in their famous book, ‘Ecofeminism’ offered the ecofeminist view in order to put forth a critique of modern development. They believed that ecofeminist thought would develop a new cosmology and new anthropology. Shiva (1988) debating over the ‘development’ paradigm of the new era, termed it as maldevelopment. She states that at the heart of this development is violence, a violation of nature and women: ‘this violence against nature and women is built into the very mode of perceiving both and forms the basis of the current development paradigm’ (1988: xvi).
New Vision: Subsistence Perspective

Carolyn Merchant describes the term ‘partnership’ and treats ‘nature’ in a gender-neutral way. A partnership ethics of earth-care allows both women and men to enter into mutual relationships with each other and the planet independently of gender (Datar 2011:172). She avoids gendering nature as a mother or a goddess; neither does she endorse any special relationship of women with nature. She affirms an anthropogenic or human-generated environmental ethics and metaphor.

Ecofeminists developed other strands as well like liberal, socialist, developmental and subsistence that challenge the basic premise of dualism that men are associated with culture and women are associated with nature. Thus, it can be looked upon as a paradigm shift. It considers patriarchy as the basis of this dualism.

Ecofeminism developed by Mies and Shiva offers a subsistence perspective or survival perspective (Mies and Shiva 1993:297). Food security is a major concern for women across the globe. Women bring food to the family by participating as producers and they reproduce for the families and communities. So, they have a dual role to play, as a producer and reproducer. This subsistence perspective can be summarised as follows:

1. The aim of economic activity is not to produce ever-growing mountains of commodities for an anonymous market but the creation and re-creation of life.
2. Nature is respected in all its richness and diversity, both for its own sake and for providing support for other life forms.
3. A man’s domination over nature, women and other humans is to be replaced.
4. It promotes participatory democracy or grassroots democracy.
5. It demands a new paradigm of science, technology and knowledge.
6. Struggles for empowerment of women must include a strategy uniting all the exploited and oppressed groups.

Women’s activism in protecting environment is acknowledged by ecofeminist theory. I found this perspective closer to the reality I was attempting to study.

Organisation of the thesis

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 describes the background to the study, research question, statement of the problem, and rationale of the study. In order to do this, the chapter covers an overview of literature about women-nature relationship from the ecofeminist perspective. After drawing a distinction between social movements and new social movements, I have highlighted environmental movements which are considered as new social movements. Following this, I have also examined
women’s role in ecological struggles. In addition, there is a review of the stories of struggle of anti-SEZ and JNPP, the main foci of my study, in the form of research papers, books, newspaper clippings and articles. The grey literature made accessible from activists proved useful in understanding the nuances of the struggles.

Chapter 2 outlines the methodology of this project. A qualitative study was undertaken as it entailed understanding women’s motives, mobilisation process and the impact of participation on their lives. The data was generated through in-depth interviews of the women participants in the said struggles. The chapter focuses on the sample selected for the study and methods/methodologies for data collection and analysis.

Chapter 3 highlights the background to the anti-SEZ struggle from Raigad: Pen. The major thrust in this chapter is to present the detailed description of struggle site and the course of struggle. There is also a discussion on the concept of Special Economic Zones, its magnitude; the strategies of leaders to mobilise men and women in the struggle, and finding out provision of special drives for involving the women in the struggle. The chapter also highlights how environmental resources are woven into cultural specificities.

Chapter 4 provides the background to the struggle site of Jaitapur Nuclear Power protest. The community life and especially that of the fisher women’s course of the struggle is studied.

Chapter 5 is about women in anti-SEZ struggle. The data is presented with reference to questions asked. The responses are presented along with the emergent themes followed with discussion.

Chapter 6 is about women in Jaitapur Nuclear Power Protest. The two narratives are constructed based on two group interviews, viz. the interviews of agriculturalist women and the group of fisherwomen. The narratives highlight their process of mobilisation, roles, motivation and impact. The emergent themes are presented and discussed.

Chapter 7 summarises the findings of the study done at the two struggle sites. It makes few recommendations for further studies in the area of gender and environment.