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3. WOMEN AND ENVIRONMENT- A REVIEW

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Abstract

The past few decades have witnessed an enormous interest in both the women's movement and the ecology (environmental) movement. Eco-feminism or ecological feminism is a combination of feminism and ecology. Eco-feminism like feminism aims to highlight the oppression of women by men and also raises its voice against social discrimination, social injustice etc. Eco-feminism is ecological because like ecology it is concerned with the relationship of human beings with each other and in turn their relationship with nature. This paper offers an introduction to the literature and issues of this area. Eco-feminists revolve around the dominations of women and nature. It provides an overview of the scholarly literature in eco-feminism and its insights. There are many movements, protests, and activities, acting against ecological crises over the past three decades, which are largely responsible for the emergence of ecofeminism. Through Western ecofeminist perspectives, it is clear that the root cause of exploitation of women and nature is patriarchal system prevailing in the society. The Indian environmental movement is kaleidoscopic in nature (Krishna, 1996), representing various points of view. Ecofeminism is a movement against patriarchy and the goal of ecofeminism is not only to free women from domination and to save nature from destruction but also to eradicate patriarchal structure from the society that gives birth to all forms of dominations.

KEY WORDS: Ecofeminism, feminism, ecology, Western perspectives, Indian environmental movement, nature, women, and patriarchy

Ecofeminism is rooted in the critical insight that environmental crisis is a feminist issue. Ecofeminist discourses draw from feminism and critical ecology to identify comparable mechanisms of exploitation that affect women and the environment. Ecofeminism is a feminism oriented on ecology and is the latest development of feminist theory. The relationship between nature and women is the basic content.

Ecofeminism can be defined as a "value system, a social movement, and a practice... (This) also offers a political analysis that explores the links between feminism and environmental destruction. It is an "awareness" that begins with the realization that the exploitation of nature is intimately linked to Western Man's attitude toward women and tribal cultures..." (Birkeland, 1993). Ecofeminism thinks there is an inherent association between nature and women. Ecofeminism is based on

certain fundamental claims that point to the existence of important connections between the oppression of women and oppression of nature. It is essential to understand the nature of these connections in order to understand the oppression of women and nature, and finally, every feminist theory must include an ecological perspective and vice versa (Warren, 1987). Ecofeminism originated and developed in the West and it studies the biological, social, and cultural aspects of human life, as well as the behavior and relation of human beings with other entities. Feminism does not simply derive from the exploitation of women by men but, as the major ecofeminists posit, it includes how women are the firsthand victims of the degradation of nature because of their close association and dependency on it (Merchant, 1980).

There are many movements, protests, and activities, acting against ecological crises over the past three decades, which are largely responsible for the emergence of ecofeminism, which has recently emerged as an evolving theory. Ecofeminism emerged in the 1970s with an increasing consciousness of the connections between women and nature. The term, "ecofeminism," was coined by French writer Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 who called upon women to lead an ecological revolution to save the planet. Such an ecological revolution would entail new gender relations between women and men and between humans and nature. Francoise d'Eaubonne, a founder of the stream of Feminism and Ecology, claims that the root cause of domination of women and nature is patriarchy. She has given a sophisticated historical analysis of patriarchy. Francoise asserts that women are life-givers, life-preservers, and have concern for future generations, whereas men are exploitative, plundering and subordinate women and nature. As such, she argues that a more balanced relationship between the sexes would translate as a more balanced relationship between production and consumption. Ynestra King, a North-American ecofeminist, adds her perspective to the evolution of ecofeminism as a theory which, throughout history, has established a connection between women and nature, by considering women as inferior to male-dominated culture and all social practices as the root of ecological destruction. Dialectical feminism (King, 1990) attempts to resolve this nature/culture dualism. Mary Daly (1978), an American radical lesbian feminist, has given her remarkable contribution to the field of ecofeminism by her major work *Gyn/Ecology* (1978), defending that male connection with culture is generally considered as superior to that of women's connection with nature; however, she herself rejects this belief and sustains that the female/nature connection is a more of a strength than a weakness. She further juxtaposes female and male qualities, with women being defined as having life-giving power, fostering a dynamic connection between animal and earth, whereas men have a death-dealing power, which translates as an incapacity of bonding with nature, and the destructive control over women and the environment. Starhawk (2002), a spiritual ecofeminist, Wiccan priestess, social activist, and psychotherapist—puts forth three concepts of earth-based spirituality: the first, consisting in "immanence", presupposes that the Goddess exists in all

particles, spanning the human, animal, and plant world; the second refers to the "interconnection" that translates as oneness between the natural cycles and processes, with the animal and plant world; the third evokes "compassionate" lifestyle, defined as care for each other's. Starhawk propounds that women should support the save-the-earth movement. Merchant (1980).

The major assert that the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is an underlying cause of ecological crisis, and the domination of women and nature. Science, technology, and capitalism are the symbols of social progress, but these are also the motives for depletion of natural resources and loss of ecological values and culture. Plumwood (1993) has pointed to various causes of the domination of women and nature, such as dualism, rationalistic culture, global free market, techno science, production and consumer oriented market economy. Amongst these, she propounds that the root cause of the debasement of women and nature is dualism, which implies not only depicting a relationship of difference, dichotomy, and non-identity, but systematically constructing an inferior one. According to Karen J. Warren (1997), the root cause of domination is to be found in all types of "isms", that is, "isms of domination" like racism, classicism, heterosexism, militarism, and naturism, which are unjustified systems of exploitation. Gaard (1993) affirms that ecofeminism as a theory revolves around the peace, labor, women's health care, anti-nuclear, environment, and animal liberation movements, the core objective being that of bringing an end to the oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality by challenging the hierarchical structure of power and domination and subordination.

The Indian environmental movement is kaleidoscopic in nature (Krishna, 1996), representing various points of view. The different ideological streams identified by Ramachandra Guha (1988) are Crusading Gandhian, Ecological Marxist, Appropriate Technology and, more recently, Scientific Conservation and Wilderness Enthusiasts (Gadgil-Guha, 1995). The environment movement in India has a very long history that goes well into India's past. In the first two decades after independence, environmental conflicts were muted. In the past two to three decades, however, there has been a sharpening of conflicts. India has witnessed a number of popular movements to protect community rights over natural resources that began with the famous Chipko movement in the Garhwal Himalayas in the 1970s and got global publicity with the Narmada Bachao Andolan. The 1970s also witnessed a number of forest-based conflicts in the tribal areas of Bihar, Orissa, MP, Maharashtra and AP. There have also been local level struggles by village artisans faced with depleting forest resources. But they have yet to be politically organized (Gadgil-Guha 1995).

The debate over growth, development and equity issues from a woman's perspective have thrown new light on the dimensions and In India, the most visible advocate of ecofeminism is Vandana Shiva. According to Shiva (1988), women and nature have an intricate and intimate relationship, as well as a shared history on the

grounds of a common experience of exploitation, degradation, and domination by an andocentric attitude. She further argues that the degradation of women and nature is due to the emergence of a new world order that is based upon development modernization, advancements in science and technology, and new reproduction technologies. She argues with Maria Mies that whenever women have protested against ecological destruction or nuclear annihilation, they were "aware of the connections between patriarchal violence against women, other people and nature" (Mies 1993). Agrawal thinks ecofeminism is inadequate because it ideologically constructs relationships between gender and nature, which become part of a structure that cannot be considered whole. This limitation has given a platform to Beena Agrawal to come up with an alternative theoretical formulation to ecofeminism, which she terms as Feminist Environmentalism. Chayya Dattar (2011), a leading feminist activist and founding member of "Forum against Rape" and "Stree Mukti Sanghata" (Women's Liberation Organization), tries to develop, in her work titled *Ecofeminism an alternative development model* which is opposed to market-oriented capitalism. Focusing on decentralization of power, the local production system, and subsistence practices, she especially addresses the problems of rural women whose livelihood depends upon natural resources. In the article titled "Tradition of Prudence Lost: A Tragic World of Broken Relationship" (2003), Aruna Gnanadasan exhibits the loss of age-old agrarian tradition due to globalization. Her basic contention is that the liberalization of the economy and the privatization of every sector are replacing the livelihood of villagers. As she says, "What of the life and livelihood of the farming community in India? How is this community going to survive when its intricate web of relationship with the earth is broken?" (Gnanadasan, 2003) simultaneously alluding to the impact of dam construction, nuclear reactors and other industrial projects on the farming community. Greta Guard once vividly portrayed the ecofeminists as a lake, from which the complexity of the source and branches of ecological feminist theory can be seen. Liberal, spiritual, cultural, social, and socialist feminism have all been concerned with improving the human/nature relationship and each has contributed to an ecofeminist perspective in different ways.

The relationship between nature and women are the basic content in the research of Ecofeminism. Ecofeminism thinks there is an inherent association between nature and women. Ecofeminism has been founded and developed on the basis of the research on the relationship between nature and women. Recognition and study of relationship between nature and women is the theoretical basis of research of ecofeminism. Recent works by feminists Susan Griffin (1978) and Mary Daly (1978), Carolyn Merchant (1980), Ynestra King (1981), Ariel Kay Salleh (1984), Karen Warren (1987, 1990), Val Plumwood (1993) and others, highlight the fact that ecology is a feminist issue. The connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature are highlighted in order to understand "why the environment is a feminist issue", as well

as "why feminist issues can be addressed in terms of environmental concerns" (Gaard 1993). The connection of women and nature is generally based on three claims of an empirical, conceptual, and epistemological character (Eaton & Lorentzen, 2003). First, the empirical claim shows that the firsthand victim of the impact of environmental deterioration is woman in the name of the development of science and technology because of her close association and dependency on nature. In short, the ecofeminist empirical claim examines the sociopolitical and economic structures that reduce many women's lives to poverty, ecological deprivation, and economic powerlessness. Second conceptual claim focuses on the construction of society on the basis of a "hierarchy and dualism". The third claim is epistemological, centering on knowledge of nature. In this perspective, women have historically been agrarian cultivators and thus favor sustainable and renewable agriculture. Moreover, they are heralded as saviors of nature, invested with the mission to protect, preserve, and nurture the environment (Daly, 1978) these are the three connections between women and nature which have paved the path for ecofeminism to frame debates on the exploitation of women and nature.

Ecofeminism is a movement against patriarchy. The goal of ecofeminism is to empower women and to rescue nature from patriarchal oppression and exploitation, which we need today. Thus, our aim is not to suggest elimination of only one form of domination rather all forms of dominations from the society. Hence, to emancipate women and nature from further exploitation this dominant androcentric attitude need to be changed. The domination should not be so strong as to suffocate the weak. It is only an enlightened self that can change its attitude towards women as well as nature and endorse sustainability for the future generation. The goal of ecofeminism should not only to free women from domination and to save nature from destruction but also to eradicate patriarchal structure from the society that gives birth to all forms of dominations.

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