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# **ECOFEMINISM – FEMINIST REFLECTIONS ON GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT CRISIS**

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**Abstract:** An Ecofeminism is a recent development in feminist thought which argues that the current global environmental crisis is a predictable outcome of patriarchal culture. This paper seeks to outline the ecofeminist movement which focuses on ecology and women. I also deal with women's relationship to the environment that is nature and culture. Ecological feminism, or ecofeminism, is an interdisciplinary movement that calls for a new way of thinking about nature, politics, and spirituality. Ecofeminist theory questions or rejects previously held patriarchal paradigms and holds that the domination of women by men is intimately linked to the destruction of the environment. Ecofeminists argue that traditional male-centered approaches involving exploitation of and supremacy over women are echoed in patriarchal practices and discourse with respect to the environment. Ecofeminism relates the oppression and domination of all subordinate groups to the oppression and domination of nature. The aim and main objective of my present study is analysis and interpretation of the textual and conceptual essence of ecofeminism. To achieve this, it is essential to explore relevant ecofeminist theories and perspectives through and vast literature survey.

**Keywords:** Ecofeminism, Environmental, Feminism, Patriarchal.

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**Introduction:** An Ecofeminism is a recent development in feminist thought which argues that the current global environmental crisis is a predictable outcome of patriarchal culture. Ecological feminism, or ecofeminism, is an interdisciplinary movement that calls for a new way of thinking about nature, politics, and spirituality. Ecofeminist theory questions or rejects previously held patriarchal paradigms and holds that the domination of women by men is intimately linked to the destruction of the environment. Ecofeminists argue that traditional male-centered approaches involving exploitation of and supremacy over women are echoed in patriarchal practices and discourse with respect to the environment. Ecofeminism relates the oppression and domination of all subordinate groups to the oppression and domination of nature.

Ecofeminism is a social and political movement which points to the existence of considerable common ground between environmentalism and feminism, with some currents linking deep ecology and feminism. Ecofeminists argue that important experiential, theoretical, and linguistic parallels exist between the oppression and subordination of women and nature in Western cultural tradition through the transformation of differences into culturally constructed conceptual binaries and ideological hierarchies that allow a systematic justification of domination ("power-over power") by subjects classed into higher-ranking categories over objects classed into lower-ranking categories (e.g. man over woman, culture over nature). Beyond these nature/culture, male/female dualisms, ecofeminists posit that the Western cosmology dichotomizes all aspects of perceived reality; in examples without a cultural "opposite," the category "x" is split into "x" and "not-x" or the absence of "x." Ecofeminists also explore the intersectionality between sexism, the domination of nature, racism, speciesism, and other characteristics of social inequality. In some of their current work, ecofeminists argue that the capitalist and patriarchal systems that predominate throughout the world reveal a triple domination of the Global South (people who live in the Third World), women, and nature. This domination and exploitation of women, of poorly resourced peoples and of nature sits at the core of the ecofeminist analysis.

Ecofeminism is a term coined in 1974 by Françoise d'Eaubonne. He explains,

“It is a philosophy and movement born from the union of feminist and ecological thinking and the belief that the social mentality that leads to the domination and oppression of women is directly connected to the social mentality that leads to the abuse of the natural environment. It combines eco-anarchism or bioregional democracy with a strong ideal of feminism.” [1]

Its advocates often emphasize a deep reverence for all life, and the importance of interrelationships between humans, non-human others (e.g. pigs, squirrels, toads), and the earth. A central tenet in ecofeminism states that male ownership of land has led to a dominator culture (patriarchy), manifesting itself in food export, over-grazing, the tragedy of the commons, exploitation of people, and an abusive land ethic, in which animals and land are valued only as economic resources.

While ecofeminist literary critics examine literature from all cultures and throughout history to explore female perspectives on nature, nineteenth-century English and American literature is seen as a particularly rich area of study. As ecofeminist literary critics have shown, nature writing by women in both England and the United States flourished in the nineteenth century. The study of flora and fauna, which could be done relatively close to home, was seen as a respectable occupation for middle- and upper-class women; thus, a number of them took an interest in writing about their natural environment. Few of these female nature writers are well-known outside scholarly circles, but they are seen as important because they offer radically different perspectives on the study of plants and animals than do their male contemporaries. Also significant is that many of these women regarded nature as a liberating force, especially in contrast to their confining domestic existences.

Other ecofeminists claim that the degradation of nature contributes to the degradation of women. For example, Thomas-Slyter and Rocheleau detail how in Kenya, the capitalist driven export economy has caused most of the agriculturally productive land to be used for monoculture cash crops.

“This led to intensification of pesticide use, resource depletion and relocation of subsistence farmers, especially women, to the hillsides and less productive land, where their deforestation and cultivation led to soil erosion, furthering the environmental degradation that hurts their own productivity.” [2]

Vandana Shiva makes it clear that one of the missions of ecofeminism is to redefine how societies look at productivity and activity of both women and nature who have mistakenly been deemed passive, allowing for them both to be ill-used. For example, she draws a picture of a stream in a forest. According to her, in our society it is perceived as unproductive if it is simply there, fulfilling the needs for water of women’s families and communities, until engineers come along and tinker with it, perhaps damming it and using it for generating hydropower. The same is true of a forest unless it is planted with a monoculture plantation of a commercial species.

“A forest may very well be productive, protecting groundwater, creating oxygen, allowing villagers to harvest fruit, fuel, and craft materials, and creating a habitat for animals that are also a valuable resource. However, for many, if it is not for export or contribution to GDP, without a dollar value attached, it cannot be seen as a productive resource (4 *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* 1988). Some ecofeminists point to the linguistic links between oppression of women and land, such as the term “rape the land.” Terms also express nature as feminine (using the pronoun “she” and the term “Mother Nature”) and women as Ecofeminism 2 “wild” and “untamed” (like nature).” [3]

Ecofeminists also criticize Western lifestyle choices, such as consuming food that has travelled thousands of miles and playing sports (such as golf and downhill skiing) which inherently require ecological destruction.

Feminist and social ecologist Janet Biehl has criticized ecofeminism as idealist, focusing too much on the idea of a mystical connection with nature and not enough on the actual conditions of women. However,

this line of criticism may not apply to many ecofeminists who reject both mysticism and essentialist ideas about the connection between women and nature. This antiessentialist ecofeminism has become more prominent since the early 1990s: it has an epistemological analysis of the Enlightenment, places the spirituality in immanent world and then practices modern activism. The materialist ecofeminism discuss economical and political issues and can use metaphorically the link of Great mother earth or Gaia (while the idealistic tendency uses it literally).

Françoise d'Eaubonne proposed a cooperative system in small unities (villages) with autonomization, without alienating technology. With ecofeminist ideals and pagan practices these projects are sometimes seen as a form of primitivism. However, while some ecofeminists see technology as inherently alienating, many see a substantial role for modern technologies in the creation and operation of such villages. A number of ecofeminists advocate the use of technologies such as solar power as a way to stay off 'the grid', which they regard as more important than relying upon poisonous industrial processes or materials. The ecological movement is itself split on issues like this. However, it is likely that an intermediate technology, appropriate technology, would be preferred in general if an ecofeminist movement sought to spread into developing nations quickly.

One strand of ecofeminism, associated with Carol J. Adams, Marti Kheel and Greta Gaard has consistently argued that veganism is an important part of ecofeminist ethics. Other positions represented by Val Plumwood and Karen J. Warren argue for a contextual vegetarianism which ties animal ethics more to material and social context. Yet other ecofeminists place ethical emphasis on ecosystem health at the expense of valuing individual animals or stipulating vegetarianism or veganism.

There are different relevant schools of feminist thought and activism that relate to the analysis of the environment. Ecofeminism argues that there is a connection between women and nature that comes from their shared history of oppression by a patriarchal society; this connection also comes from the positive identification of women with nature. This relationship can be argued from an essentialist position, attributing it to biological factors, or from a position that explains it as a social construct.

Vandana Shiva claims that women have a special connection to the environment through their daily interactions with it that has been ignored.

"Women in subsistence economies, producing and reproducing wealth in partnership with nature, have been experts in their own right of holistic and ecological knowledge of nature's processes. But these alternative modes of knowing, which are oriented to the social benefits and sustenance needs are not recognised by the capitalist reductionist paradigm, because it fails to perceive the interconnectedness of nature, or the connection of women's lives, work and knowledge with the creation of wealth." [4]

Feminist environmentalists study gender interests in natural resources and processes based on their different roles in daily work and responsibilities. Social feminists focus on the role of gender in political economy by analyzing the impact of production and reproduction of men and women's relation to economic systems.

Feminist poststructuralists explain gender's relation to the environment as a reflection of beliefs of identity and difference such as race, class, gender, age, and ethnicity. In this way they try to explain the relation of gender and development. Liberal feminist environmentalists treat women as having an active role in environmental protection and conservation programs. This role can become problematic.

"There is a common symbolism in the idea of 'man' pitted against nature while nature is feminized and "woman" is assumed to have profound connections with her environment. These views of gender and environment constitute feminist political ecology, which links feminist cultural ecology, political ecology, geographical ecology and feminist political ecology into one concept." [5]

It argues that gender is a relevant factor in determining access and control of natural resources as it relates to class, race, culture and ethnicity to transform the environment and to achieve the community's opportunities of sustainable development.

Ecological feminism is an interdisciplinary movement that calls for a new way of thinking about nature, politics, and spirituality. It questions or rejects previously held patriarchal paradigms and holds that the domination of women by men is intimately linked to the destruction of the environment. It argues that traditional male-centered approaches involving exploitation of and supremacy over women are echoed in patriarchal practices and discourse with respect to the environment.

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