



Ecofeminism: A Sociological Analysis of the Inter-relationship between Women, Nature and Power Structures:

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Abstract- Ecofeminism offers a critical sociological framework for understanding the inter-relationship between women, nature, and power structures within patriarchal and capitalist societies. Rooted in feminist theory and environmental sociology, ecofeminism argues that the domination of women and the exploitation of nature arise from the same logic of control, hierarchy, and profit. This perspective highlights how gendered power relations intersect with economic, political, and cultural systems to marginalise both women and ecological resources, particularly in the Global South. From a sociological standpoint, ecofeminism examines how social institutions such as the family, state, market, and religion reinforce unequal power structures that legitimise environmental degradation and gender oppression. Women’s traditional roles in agriculture, water collection, or security, and caregiving place them in close interaction with nature, making them disproportionately affected by ecological crisis such as deforestation, climate change, and resource depletion. At the same time, their experiential knowledge positions them as key agents of environmental sustainability and resistance. The abstract also engages with intersectionality to show her class, caste, race, and ethnicity shape women’s ecological experiences. In the Indian context, movements like Chipko, Narmada Bachao Andolan, and tribal environmental science struggles illustrate ecofeminism in practice, where women challenge dominant development models and assert alternative, community – centred approaches to nature. Overall, ecofeminism not only critiques existing power structures but also envisions a transformative social order based on equality, care, and ecological justice. By linking gender justice with environmental sustainability, ecofeminism provides a holistic sociological lens to address contemporary social – environmental crises.

Keywords:-Ecofeminism, Patriarchy, environmental justice, sustainability, gender ecology, women and nature.

I. Introduction

Rapid environmental degradation, climate changes, and resources depletion have become defining issues of the 21st century. Sociologist increasingly recognise that environmental crisis do not affect all social groups equally. Women – specially in agrarian and marginalised community/are more vulnerable to ecological destruction due to their direct dependence on natural resources. Ecofeminism, a fusion of ecological and feminist thought, argues that the same patriarchal ideologies that oppress women also dominate nature.

This research paper examines ecofeminism as a sociological approach, its conceptual foundations, major theoretical perspectives, and the lived experiences of women in environmental struggles.

Ecofeminism combines ecology and feminism to study the parallel domination of women and nature



- Women and nature shares a symbolical and material connection.
- Patriarchy is the root cause of both gender inequality and environmental exploitation.
- Woman's ecological knowledge is crucial for sustainable living.
- Environmental issues are gendered and disproportionately burden women.

II. Historical background

The term ecofeminism was first introduced by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne (1974). The ideology grew during the 1970s-1980s through:

- Anti-nuclear protest
- Environmental justice movements
- Global feminist activism

In India, ecofeminism gained prominence through movements such as the Chipko Andolan, where rural women led non-violent resistance to protect forest.

- Theoretical perspectives cultural: spiritual ecofeminism views women closer to nature due to biological and cultural roles (motherhood, caregiving).
- Social/ Materialistic Ecofeminism
- Argues woman and nature are oppressed not naturally but structurally – through capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism.
- Liberal Ecofeminism
- Demands equal representation of women in environmental decision – making and policy.
- Radical Ecofeminism
- Identifies patriarchy as a primary system that dominates both women and nature.
- Socialistic Ecofeminism
- Links gender, class, caste, and environmental exploitation.

III. Review of literature:

Vandana Shiva highlights how capitalists development models destroy biodiversity and exploit women's labour.

Maria Mies examined the connection between colonial extraction, woman's unpaid labour and ecological degradation.

Mies and Shiva both argued:

- Women's labour and nature's resources were both invisibilized and exploited.
- Global capitalism intensifies ecological destruction and gender inequality.
- Indigenous woman's knowledge systems offer sustainable alternative.



Their work strongly links ecofeminism with political economy and rural woman's experiences.

Carolyn Merchant in "The Death of Nature," she analysed how modern science transformed nature into a mechanical resource. She proposed that scientific industrial and capitalist revolutions objectified nature as a resource to be controlled. She showed how the mechanistic worldview replaced traditional organic matter of hours, increasing the exploitation of both women and nature.

In "Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her" Susan Griffin (1978) examines how western culture has historically equated woman with emotionality and nature with chaos, justifying their domination. Her poetic critique laid that ideological foundation for ecofeminist thought.

The term ecofeminism was first introduced by Françoise d'Eaubonne, who argued that women subordination and ecological crisis stem from patriarchal domination. She emphasised that women possess unique logical inside and that feminism must incorporate ecological sustainability.

Ariel Salleh(1997) Ecofeminism as politics develop the idea embodied materialism showing that woman's daily productive labour care for, subsistence work provides unpaid ecological services. She argues that women, specially from marginalised communities, are the most affected by environmental degradation Starhawk(1982,1987) focused on goddess traditions and spiritual connection between women and nature.

IV. Her works emphasize:

- Holistic thinking
- Community bonding
- Eco-spirituality

However, critics argue that spiritual ecofeminism risks biological essentialism. Ynestra King highlighted the emotional and ethical dimensions of ecofeminism. She argued that dismantling patriarchy requires emotional transformation and shifting from domination to partnership.

Bina Agarwal (1992, 1998) critique essential ecofeminism and stresses:

- Gender is not biologically linked to nature; it is shaped by social roles.
- Women's environmental involvement results from their responsibilities and resource dependence.
- Effective environmental management requires women's participation and collective decision – making.

Agarwal offers a sociologically grounded and empirical perspective.
India presents rich empirical examples of ecofeminist activism.



- Women manage water, forest resources, seeds, and agriculture.
- Deforestation increases their workload.
- Patriarchal restrictions limit resource ownership but increases environmental responsibility.

Indian ecofeminism is grounded more in survival struggles than in Western philosophical discourse.

Women play essential role in environmental conservation such as:

- Biodiversity preservation through seed saving
- Sustainable agriculture
- Community-led water management
- Waste reduction and recycling practices.
- Leadership in environmental movements.

Their intimate ecological knowledge arises from daily interaction with natural resources.

V. Case- Studies

The Chipko movement:

Uttarakhand, India- 1970, Key Women activists- Gaura Devi, Bachni Devi, village women.

The Chipko movement is one of the strongest examples of ecofeminism in the world. Women literally hugged trees to prevent commercial logging.

Why Women?

- Women were directly dependent on forest for fuelwood, fodder, water and food.
- Deforestation increased their work load and enlarged their survival.
- Patriarchal state policies handed forest contracts to male contractors, ignoring women's knowledge.
- Ecofeminist significance shows how patriarchy and capitalism exploit both women and nature.
- Demonstrate how women act as if logical protectors go to their lived experience.
- Challenged state power and commercial interest.

Silent Valley Movement

Kerala, India 1970s – 1980s. Issue – proposed hydroelectric dam in silent Valley rainforest. Women from local tribal and rural communities participated actively in resisting the project.

Why women?

Their livelihood is dependent on forest produce, clean water and fertile lands. Dam would displace communities and affect ecological balance.



The ecofeminist significance is that woman's ecological knowledge was central. The moment showed that environmental issues are deeply tied to community survival, gender and justice.

Anti-Mining Struggles:

Niyamgiri Hills, Odisha. Community: Dongria Kondh tribal women. Issue: Bauxite mining by a multinational corporation. Women led protest to protect sacred hills, forest and water sources.

Why woman?

- Forest provides food, medicinal herbs, water and cultural identity.
- Mining threatened their livelihood, health and autonomy.
- Patriarchal state – corporate alliance ignored women's rights.

The eco-feminist significance shows intersection of gender, tribal identity, ecology and corporate power. It demonstrate how marginalised women protect ecosystems more effectively than state agencies.

Bhopal Gas Tragedy and Women's Environmental Activism – 1984 onwards

. Issue: Toxic gas leak by Union Carbide India Limited pesticide plant. Women survivors formed long – term movements demanding justice, rehabilitation and environmental safety.

Why women?

- Women faced chronic illnesses, miscarriage, reproductive health problems.
- They became leaders in demanding accountability and environmental reform.

The ecofeminist significance exposes how industrial capitalism harms both women's bodies and ecosystems. Highlights gendered and ability to environmental disaster.

How these case studies support ecofeminism

Across all cases, three patterns appear clearly.

- Women are the most affected by environmental degradation because their survival and labour depend on natural resources.
- Patriarchal and capitalist power structures exploit both women and nature while benefiting elite groups.
- - Women are strong environmental leaders offering sustainable, community – based and democratic alternatives.

VI. Methodology:

This research is qualitative and analytical, relying on secondary sources including books, journals, articles and case studies. The methodology includes;

- Content Analysis
- Sociological theoretical interpretation
- Comparative case study approach.



Analysis And Discussion:

- Ecofeminism reveals that:
- -- Environmental degradation increases women's labour (water collection, fuel wood gathering).
 - Woman's ecological knowledge is undervalued in main stream policies.
 - Patriarchal structures control both land rights and female bodies.
 - Woman – lead ecological movements adopt non—violent, community – centred approaches.
 - Climate change has distant gendered impacts – migration disease – food scarcity.
- Ecofeminism integrates class, caste, ethnicity and race with gender – technology relation example – tribal women in India depend heavily on forest for livelihood; as the impact of deforestation is gendered and class – specific.
- Eco-feminist critique mainstream development models that:
 - Prioritise economic growth over sustainability.
 - Marginalise woman's knowledge.
 - Displace one rebel communities.

Ecofeminism introduce gender as a central category in environmental studies. It emphasised sustainability, care ethics and community – based knowledge. It credit capitalist exploitation and technocratic models and provide frameworks for women – lead climate activist

Findings –

- Ecofeminism highlights interlinked systems of domination.
- Women are disproportionately affected by ecological crisis.
- Women possess critical ecological skills essential for sustainability.
- Eco-feminist moments are effective in community mobilisation.
- Environmental policy remains male – dominated, limiting gender perspective.
- Critics argue that linking woman “naturally” with nature ignores diversity of woman's experiences. Spiritual ecofeminism is sometimes seen as lacking in structural analysis.

Ecofeminism in increasingly relevant due to:

- Climate change and Global warming.
- Increasing environmental disasters.
- Rising land conflicts.
- Food and water insecurity.
- Heightened awareness of indigenous and women's rights.

VII. Conclusion:

The analysis of ecofeminism demonstrates that the operation of woman and the degradation of the environment are not separate or coincidental phenomena, but whether interconnected outcomes of deeply rooted patriarchal, capitalist and radical social structures. Ecofeminism, therefore, offers more than an environmental or



feminist perspective - it provides a holistic framework for understanding how systems of domination operate across gender, nature, class, caste, ethnicity and global power relations.

The research highlights that women particularly those from rural, tribal and marginalised communities experience environmental crisis in more direct and disproportionate ways. Their every day intuitions with land, water, forest and agriculture position them as both victims of its logical degradation and as key agents of environmental stewardship. Eco-feminist movements – whether the Chipko Andolan in India, seeds sovereignty activism, or global climate justice campaigns demonstrate how women’s voices and indigenous knowledge systems are central to sustainable ecological practices.

While ecofeminism faces criticism such as essentialism and cultural bias, it continues to evolve by incorporating intersectionality, political ecology and social justice frameworks. This contemporary critical ecofeminism rejects simply cyclic association and instead sizes structural inequalities, community knowledge and ethical relationships with nature.

In conclusion, ecofeminism is not only a theoretical lens but also a transformative approach that reimagines development, justice and sustainability. It calls for dismantling exploitative systems and building an ecological future grounded in equality, care, and collective well – being. As the world confronts climate change, resource conflicts and widening social inequalities, ecofeminism provides a crucial pathway towards more inclusive, resilient and environmentally conscious societies.

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