

Ecofeminism: Exploitation of Women and Nature

Dr. Tasneem Anjum

Associate Professor & Head, Department of English, Pratibha Niketan College, Nanded, Maharashtra, India.

Abstract— *Ecofeminism fuses ecology and feminism into one and seeks to draw parallels between the exploitation of the environment and the exploitation of women. It believes that the earth is interconnected, and nature does not recognize human boundaries. It holds that one of the reasons for the destruction of the Earth is that patriarchy only values the masculine traits of conquering and dominance and devalues the 'feminine' traits of life-giving and nurturing. The patriarchal culture has been habitual to see women and nature as 'objects'.*

Keywords— *Environment, Ecology, Exploitation, Feminism.*

Ecofeminists believe that male-dominated culture thrives on sexism, racism, class-exploitation, and environmental destruction. Exploitation of women and nature is severely protested by the ecofeminists world over.

Ecofeminism calls upon women and men to reconceptualise world, in non-hierarchical ways. In this, the feminist movement and the environmental movement are seen to work together, on the assumption that they both stand for egalitarian, non-hierarchical systems. Indeed the liberation of women and of nature is seen as intimately linked.

In practice, there is enormous evidence historically of women's subordinate position. These inequalities relate in particular to three aspects: 1) the gender division of labour; 2) property rights, especially in land; 3) juridical authority and access to public decision-making forums. In Indian context, all three types of inequalities continues in the present period and critically influences where women are placed in relation to institutions for environmental change today.

These three elements of gender inequality not only underline in substantial degree the noted negative gender effects of environmental degradation, they underlie the little attention being given to women's concerns even in the emergent village institutions for environmental protection. The gender division of labour underlies the increase in women's time and energy in fuel and fodder collection. Women's lack of ownership in private land critically increases their dependence on common property resources. And their marginal representation in public decision-making forums makes them mostly takers no

makers of laws and rules for natural resources management being framed.

Ecofeminists feel that a more promising approach for an ethics of nature would be to remove the concept of rights from the central position it currently holds and focus instead on less dualistic moral concept such as respect, sympathy, care, concern, compassion, gratitude, friendship and responsibility.

Browsing the literature we find ecofeminism variously described as a political stance, a take-it-to-the streets movement, a feminist spiritual affirmation, an inspirational wellspring for women's activism, a retrieval of womanist earths wisdom, a feminist theory, an applied scholarship, a feminist rebellion within radical environmentalism, an oppositional positionality, a praxis, and a remapping of women's relationship to place and ecology.

The very term ecofeminism typically invokes strong reactions - and generally precipitates a rush to 'for' or 'against' camp making. There are three touchstone issues that separate ecofeminism- embracers from ecofeminism distancers : the prominent association of ecofeminist thought with womanist spirituality, the (putative) essentialism of the ecofeminist affirmation of a meaningful nature woman connection, and the old gown/town split between the presumptive sophistication of theory building and the presumptively a theoretical naivete of social movement and activist practices.

As conceptualized by ecofeminist pioneers such as an Ynestra King, ecological feminism held promise as a bridge across the analytical divide between radical cultural

and social feminism. King identified ecofeminism as a 'third direction', neither serving the connection between woman and nature nor reinforcing it: "the liberation of women is to be found neither in serving all connections that root us in nature nor in believing ourselves to be more natural than men." Early articulations of the intersectional and interdependent oppressions of ecology, race, sex and class pointed to a path that transcended the dichotomous rendition of the human / nature relationship, the classic subject / object split at the heart of Western philosophical inquiry. By the late 1970's, then, ecofeminism was on a roll, full of promise and intellectual excitement.

For many women, the eco-focused feminism emerging in the 1980s was necessarily rooted in a reawakening of earth honoring and earth caring, involving a rehabilitation of nature-centered traditions and invoking anew salience of earth goddess, women - wise spirituality. For these women, the central project of what they called ecofeminism was reclaiming the sacred and celebrating women's nurturing – and special – relationship with earth forces and life forces. Ecofeminism put spirituality, earth goddesses, nature / culture identities, and debates about essentialism, antiessentialism and maternalism on the feminist front burner.

As this school of thought emerged under the rubric of ecofeminism, a peculiar elision occurred. Inexplicably, even as the association of ecofeminism with a spiritually inclined school of thought became more fixed, that word also remained in circulation as a term to refer indiscriminately to all manner of feminist environmentalisms. The word ecofeminism thus became a dual signifier, both meaning the specific spiritually centered school of environmental thought and also being used as a generic term for all feminist environmentalisms.

This meant that by the late 1980s 'ecofeminism' had become a fighting word. For every woman who reveled in the association of ecofeminism with earth goddesses. There was one who winced. Many women rejected ecofeminism, particularly academics in social and biological sciences whose engagement with environmentalism was forged in a rationalist tradition, and who feared that talk of goddesses and life forces would undermine their hard-won but precarious professional credibility. For many political feminists, ecofeminism was a word to define against; the spiritual side of ecofeminism was derided as mystical bunk, dangerously apolitical and atheoretical.

The contributions of ecofeminism to feminist environmentalism are myriad, and ecofeminism itself is clearly an enduring part of the feminist environmental mix.

Contemplation and contestation of the issues provoked by ecofeminism have produced a robust and challenging literature: on anthropomorphism, on the 'sex – typing' of the planet, on encounters between feminism and deep ecology, on the nature of nature. The philosophy of ecofeminism is a well – developed field.

'Ecofeminism' as a term indicates a double political intervention, of environmentalism into feminism and feminism into environmentalism, that is as politically important as the designations 'socialist feminism' and 'black feminism' were. Most feminists who pursue scholarship and activist work on the environment – whether from 'ecofeminist' portions or not – share common interests, among them a commitment to illuminating the ways in which gender, class and race mediate people's lived experiences in local environments; an interest in examining the ways in which human – environment perceptions and values may be mediated through 'gendered' lenses and shaped by gender roles and assumptions; an interest in examining the gendered nature of constellation of political, economic and ecological power in institutions that are instrumental players in the state of the environment; and interest in exploring the interconnectedness of systems of oppression and domination. The best of the recent feminist environmental scholarship engages with and extends transnational, postcolonial and poststructuralist deconstructions and challenges.

CONCLUSION

Ecofeminism says that women are closer to nature than men are. This closeness, therefore, make women more caring and nurturing towards their environment, some indicate the biology of women as the reason behind the closeness, while others credit culture and historical factors. The social activist umbrella term of "Ecofeminism" takes the energy from the feminist movements of the 1960's and 70's and channels it into the study and deconstruction of the means and methods used to subjugate the human and non-human members that fall under the power and influence of the patriarchy and then acting to create a change. 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. Ecofeminists actions address the contradiction between production and reproduction. Women attempt to reverse the assaults of production on both biological and social reproduction by making problems visible and proposing solutions. Women challenge the ways in which mainstream society reproduces itself through socialization and politics

by envisioning and enacting alternative gender roles, employment options and political practices.

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