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ECOFIMINISM: AN ARCHETYPAL JOURNEY FROM CULTURE TO NATURE WITH A COSMOPOLITAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

Ecofeminism establishes a connection between feminism and ecology. Ecofeminism proclaims that exploitation of women and exploitation of nature are intertwined. Ecofeminists believe that this connection is illustrated through the traditionally 'female' values of reciprocity, nurturing and cooperation, which are present among both in women and in nature. Additionally, Ecofeminists draw connections between menstruation and moon cycles, childbirth and creation. Feminism is the core word of 'ecofeminism'. Both the terms, 'feminism' and 'ecofeminism' are related to human relationships in general and nature-human relationships in particular. Both these dissensual terms although vary subtly are associated with many ideologies. Essentially a culture and feminist literary criticism / theory is an interdisciplinary inquiry into signifying cultural practices and cultural products such as literary artifact that structures around gender as the fundamentally organizing category, and attempts to produce a cultural and political analysis of art and literature. It is concerned with changing the uneven power relations between man and woman. Ecofeminism includes feminism and ecology to explore, understand and protect nature and women preserving their beauty and bounty for a millennial life. Feminism is the core word of 'ecofeminism'. Both the terms are related to human relationships in general and nature-human relationships in particular. Ecofeminist writers have fictionalized the theory of feminism, nature, ecology, psychology and rightly explored the new avenues of nature-human relationships. They unveiled sexual-textual politics and deconstruct the canon and ideological hegemonies for the recovery and revaluation of women's experience for a healthy and sound nature-human and man-woman relationships un to the last. All the main and sub-schools of ecofeminism and their plea have been fictionalized by the imminent writers for the emancipation and empowerment of women as well as prosperity of the nature and welfare of humanity of all the places and time.

Keywords: *Feminism and Ecofeminism, Virgin-cure, Beef-industry, Nature-human relationships, Ecopology, Vision of millennium, Commodification, Paralysis of consciousness, Motivated oblivion, etc.*



Ecofeminism is an activist and academic movement that see critical connections between the domination of nature and the exploitation of women. Ecofeminist activism grew during the 1980s and 1990s among women from the anti-nuclear, environmental, and lesbian-feminist movements. - Lois Ann Lorentzen

In a gender hierarchy based on patriarchal systems, women are associated to nature and men to culture. Due to connection and closeness between women and nature, the former have an interest in halting the nature exploitation. Feminist and environmental movements aim at the abolition of inequalities and sustainable growth. Ecofeminism is a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. Ecofeminism brings together elements of the feminist and green movements. It takes from the green movement a concern about the impact of human activities on the non-human world and from feminism the view of humanity as gendered in ways that subordinate, exploit and oppress women. Both, the nature and women possess an infinite capacity to fulfill the need of human beings but out of greed man overexploited both resulting diabolic effects such as natural and man-made calamities. Cunning and greedy people with all the wiles and guiles of the ideological weapons, time and again have inserted false ideas about nature, culture, identity, truth, subjectivity into the fabric of the consciousness of women. For centuries together, in many ways ideas are taught through neurotic orientation and indoctrination which teaches wrong ideas and convert living people, masses particularly women into objects, cultural infants. The effects such as commodification, internalization, mental slavery, paralysis of consciousness, motivated oblivion, objectification, commodization, thingification, psychological dependency, alienation, formlessness, normalness, loss of identity, loss of self, loss of sense of culture, incapacity to fight and other related themes have been very effectively fictionalized by creative writers and critics in their fictional corpus with a strong urge of decolonization of women through freedom of minds, self-redefinition, protest, affirmation, negation, assertion and reconstruction. It celebrates hybridity, cultural polyvalence, varieties and differences in both nature and human life.

Ecofeminism is a recent offspring of feminism. Mary Mellor in her *Feminism and Ecology* very aptly comments on the archetypal journey of as follows: “Ecofeminism is a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. It emerged in the mid-1970s alongside second-wave feminism and the green movement. Ecofeminism brings together elements of the feminist and green movements, while at the same time offering a challenge to both. It takes from the green movement a concern about the impact of human activities on the non-human world and from feminism the view of humanity as gendered in ways that subordinate, exploit and oppress women.”

Ecofeminism is the recent development in the school of feminism. It is one of the most recent, dynamic, visionary and pragmatic offspring of feminism. It is a broad, dynamic, complex discipline which has transcended all the shorelines of traditional branches of knowledge.



Modern ecofeminism, or feminist ecocriticism, eschews the utter essentialism and instead focuses more on intersectional questions, such as how the nature-culture split enables the oppression of female and nonhuman bodies. It is also an activist and academic movement that sees critical connections between the exploitation of nature and the domination over women both caused by men.

In the 1993 essay entitled “Ecofeminism: Toward Global Justice and Planetary Health” author Greta Gaard and Lori Gruen outline what they call the “ecofeminist framework”. The essay provides a wealth of data and statistics in addition to laying out the theoretical aspects of the ecofeminist critique. The framework described is intended to establish ways of viewing and understanding our current global situations so that we are better able to understand how we arrived at this point, an ‘ecofeminist framework’ and what may be done to ameliorate the ills.

In the book, *Ecofeminism* (1993) authors Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies and Evan Bondi ponder over modern science and its acceptance as a universal and value-free system. Instead, they view the dominant stream of modern science as a projection of Western men's values. The privilege of determining what is considered scientific knowledge has been controlled by men, and for the most part of history restricted to men. Bondi and Miles list examples including the medicalization of childbirth and the industrialization of plant reproduction. Bondi argues that the medicalization of childbirth has marginalized midwife knowledge and changed the natural process of childbirth into a procedure dependent on specialized technologies and appropriated expertise. A common claim within ecofeminist literature is that patriarchal structures justify their dominance through binary opposition such as: heaven/earth, mind/body, male/female, human/animal, spirit/matter, culture/nature and white/non-white. Oppression is reinforced by assuming truth in these binaries and instilling them as 'marvelous to behold' through religious and scientific constructs.

The application of ecofeminism to animal rights has established vegetarian ecofeminism, which asserts that omitting the oppression of animals from feminist and ecofeminist analysis is inconsistent with the activist and philosophical foundations of both feminism as a movement to end all forms of oppression and ecofeminism. It puts into practice that the personal is political for it believes that meat-eating is a form of patriarchal domination that suggests a link between male violence and a meat-based diet. Vegetarian ecofeminism combines sympathy with the analysis of culture and politics to refine a system of ethics and action.

Ecofeminism as materialist is another common theme in ecofeminism. A materialist view connects some institutions such as labor, power and property as the source of domination over women and nature. There are connections made among these subjects because similarly there are varying values in production and reproduction.

Spiritual ecofeminism is another branch of ecofeminism, and is popular among ecofeminist authors such as Starhawk, Riane Eisler, Carol J. Adams, and a few more. Starhawk calls this an earth-based spirituality, which recognizes that the Earth is alive, that we are interconnected, as well as a community. Spiritual ecofeminism is not linked to one specific religion, but is centred on values of caring, compassion, and non-violence. Often, ecofeminists



refer to more ancient traditions, such as the worship of Gaiar, the Goddess of nature and spirituality also known as Mother Earth.

Buddhism and feminism simultaneously gained momentum in America during the 1960s. Some of the parallels between these movements include their experiential epistemology, the intersection of the constrained mind, intersectionality and connection, using emotional energy as a coping mechanism, relational ethics, and a communal mindset and lifestyle. Both Buddhist and ecofeminist practitioners viewed nature as a pathway to enlightenment and as a source of introspection and deeper thought about the relationship of nature and human beings.

Jewish ideology emphasizes leaving the earth as it was found or in better condition than it was found in. This concept is also promoted through ecofeminist theories and movements. Both Judaism and ecofeminism do not always present as social justice movements, but they often contribute ideals and motivations for social change. Social justice is an important part of Judaism, and many practitioners see social justice as a form of spirituality, and some feel this form of spirituality through environmental and feminist movements.

In Hinduism, the Ganges River is personified by the Goddess Ganga. She is a paradoxical deity, as she is supposed to be independent yet guarded, pure yet polluted. Ganga is referred to as a deity to be both subjugated and protected. The underlying tone of the passages is patriarchal despite being reverent. The pollution or purity of the Ganges river is a reflection on Ganga, which represents the relationship between spirituality and nature. Hinduism emphasizes that all lives are connected and indistinguishable. In this context, every life, be it human or animal is important.

In order to understand how the relationship between humankind and the environment, between culture and nature, it is necessary to explore and understand the etymological meaning of the Greek root *oikos*, Latinized as *eco-*, and which we can find in *eco-nomics* as well as in *eco-logy*. 'Eco', from the Greek root 'oikos' means 'house'. Just as 'economy' is the management or law of the house; ecology is the study of the house. Ecocriticism, then, is the criticism of the 'house,' i.e., the environment, as represented in literature. But the definition of 'house,' or *oikos*, is not simple. In this respect the questions such as, what is the environment? What is nature? Ecocriticism is by nature interdisciplinary, invoking knowledge of environmental studies, the natural sciences, and cultural and social studies, all of which play a part in answering the questions it poses. Ecocriticism emerged as a study of the relationship between literature and the natural environment in the mid-1990s.

Ecocriticism plays a prominent role in the study of human association with nature. In the last three four decades, ecocriticism has captured the attention of scholars and has proved itself to be an interesting field of investigation in literature. It is necessary to know what ecocriticism is and the various sub-fields of ecocriticism, in order to give a fairly comprehensive account of ecofeminism. Ecofeminism argues that there are important connections between the domination and oppression of women and domination and exploitation of nature by masculinist methods and attitudes. Here, the researcher recognizes that the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women are intimately bound up with notions of 'class', 'caste', 'race', 'colonialism', and 'neo-colonialism'.



It is also necessary to explore and examine the ecological concerns with feminist ones by targeting the hierarchies created by mind/body, nature/culture, male/female and human/non-human bifurcations. The strands of ecofeminism, the cultural strand as well as the socialist/materialist strands are just like nature human relationships. There is a strong lineage of postcolonial ecofeminism in India in terms of both activism and fiction that explicitly foreground women. Ecofeminism or ecological feminism is a combination of feminism and ecology. Ecofeminism, like feminism, aims to highlight the oppression of women by men and also raises its voice against social discrimination, social injustice etc. Ecofeminism is ecological because, like ecology it is concerned with the relationship of human beings with each other and their relationship with nature. Thus, ecofeminism is not only concerned with the ethical relationship of human beings with each other that is, between women and men but is also concerned with the ethical relationship of human beings with the natural world. Ecofeminists believe that the domination of women and the domination of nature are linked. It believes that androcentrism or patriarchy is the major cause of the domination of both women and nature. Men's control and power over both women and nature resulted in their exploitation. Thus, 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. Ecofeminists are concerned with the value of all life on earth and focuses on the unity and interrelatedness of all life on earth.

Ecocriticism then, is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its readings of the texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. The intimate connection of nature and literature is depicted in the literary works of poets and writers of all ages, belonging to different cultures of the world. The aim of ecocriticism is to demonstrate this rapport of nature and society as contextualized by the writers in their works. In this frame of reference, the terms which have gained utmost importance are ecology and ecocriticism. In the present-day scenario, Ecology portrays the manner in which plants, animals and human beings are linked to each other and their habitat. Ecocriticism explores and analyzes, texts on nature writing to add to the catalogue in literary and cultural studies, environmental awareness in literary texts, illustration of human, non-human relationship and socio-political framework which includes Marxist, ecofeminist and other approaches for contextualizing literary and cultural works. However, the most important approach within ecocriticism and ecological activism is that of the 'ecofeminists'.

William Rueckert (1978:256) is the first to use the term 'eco-criticism'. He describes in his critical work, *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*. In 1978, he advocated "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature".⁵ Eco-criticism is the study of literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view where literature scholars analyze the environment and discuss possible solutions for the improvement of the contemporary environmental condition and examine the different ways literature treats the subject of nature. Cheril Glotfelty's (1996:415) definition in the work, *The Ecocriticism Reader* is that eco-criticism is "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment". Lawrence Buell defines in his book *The Fortune of*



Environmental Criticism, (2002:25) eco-criticisms as “a study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis”. Eco-critics examine human perception of wilderness, and how it has changed in history and whether or not current environmental problems are accurately represented or even mentioned in popular culture and modern literature. Other disciplines, such as history, economics, psychology, philosophy, and biology are also considered by eco-critics to be possible or potential contributors to eco-criticism. According to the author’s perspective, eco-criticism is a study focusing on the relationship between human and nature. It not only pays attention to nature’s current state, but also to the development of humans in different ages they live in. The idea of eco-criticism applied in literary criticism plays an important role in the process of human’s exploration of finding the balance between human and nature.

Ecofeminism: Indian Scenario: Indian Scenario of ecofeminism is very fertile. Ecofeminism and the related issues are being explored and studied in India with scientific perspective very recently. India is well endowed with nature; the worship of nature has been a way of life since time immemorial. People have been worshipping the natural objects like the sun. The moon, the plants, rivers etc. But with changing times the truculence towards nature has also widened. The male dominated society in Indian culture has marginalized nature as well as woman for fulfillment of their needs since the ancient times. A positive stride towards this parochial society has been the Chipko movement, which has brought to fore the women who in large numbers took cudgels to protest against felling of trees. The conception of tree-hugging was adopted to curb activities such as deforestation, lumbering and mining. This movement was a consequence of severe turmoil emanating in local women who were influenced the most by state-level verdicts leading to environmental deterioration. Women who were champions of environmental issues are Medha Patkar, Mahasweta Devi, Arundhati Roy C.K Janu and few others.

A few women writers like Anita Desai in her works represents nature or uses symbolism of nature in relation to women characters that allows the reader to detect new and undiscovered realms of ecofeminism. Her novels like *Cry, The peacock*, *Fire on the Mountain* envelop the burning issues of nature and woman. *Cry, The Peacock* represents the vital connection between nature and woman. *Fire on the Mountain* revolves around three women characters. Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das. The response of these characters to different situations in life has been expressed with natural images to portray the inner consciousness. The novel depicts the darker shades of nature with a mishmash of darker side of concerned women characters. This novel makes it clear that ecocriticism encircles not only ecological issues, but also those natural icons that contribute to a relevant connection between human and non-human relationships. Arundhati Roy’s most acclaimed work, *The God of Small Things* depicts the relationship between women and nature and the way both are oppressed by the patriarchal society. The novel interprets the deterioration of the fictional village of Ayemenem. The pollution of the river Meenachal and the rehabilitation of the history house as a tourist harbour are crucial to the work which leads the way to the association between ecological exploitation and gender discrimination. Kiran Desai’s *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* portrays the problems generated due to man’s encroachment upon the natural order of things



and exhibits that the affinity amongst humans and animals is stronger than the relations between men.

In India, very much like the western world, the concept of ecofeminism is gradually taking its roots. Though in ancient India the branch was quite active and vital but recent time there is negligence towards the nature. It has caused diabolic effects such as cyclone, earthquake, tsunami, floods, hurricane, land sliding, drought etc. Very recently few Indian scholars took initiative for the study of ecofeminism in India. They are working for the progress of ecofeminism. Among these scholars like Tagore, Kamala Markandey, Sarah Josef, Anita Nair, Arundhati Roy etc. In it Vandna Shiva quite prominent. Vandna Shiva (2010:56) presents the scenario of ecofeminism, its status and prospectus in the following words:

The Age of Enlightenment, and the theory of progress to which it gave rise, was centered on the sacredness of two categories: modern scientific knowledge and economic development. Somewhere along the way, the unbridled pursuit of progress, guided by science and development, began to destroy life without any assessment of how fast or how much of the diversity of life on this planet is disappearing. Throughout the world... a new awareness is growing that is questioning the sanctity of science and development and revealing that these are not universal categories of progress, but the special projects of modern Western patriarchy... [In India] the everyday struggles of women for the protection of nature take place in the cognitive and ethical context... of an ancient India world-view in which nature is 'Prakriti', a living and creative process, the feminine principle from which all life arises.

In more recent times, other women who have led environmental causes and movements are Medha Patkar, Mahasweta Devi, Arundhati Roy and C. K. Janu. Medha Patkar heads the Narmada Bachao Andolan, a social movement consisting of tribal people, adivasis, farmers, environmentalists and human rights activists against the Sardar Sarovar Dam being built across the Narmada River in Gujarat, India. Mahasweta Devi, both an activist as well as a well-known feminist writer, has dedicated much of her activism and literature to the cause of betterment of tribal people and their environment in India. Arundhati Roy, best known as the Booker Prize winner of *The God of Small Things*, wields her passionate pen for causes ranging from the Narmada Bachao Andolan, to nuclear testing in India, and to the support of the separatists' demand for aazadi or freedom in Kashmir. The latest woman to come under spotlight for fighting for an environmental cause is C.K Janu, as recent as the year 2003 onwards, an adivasi woman occupying the Muthanga forests in North Kerala. This was to protest the breached agreement between the adivasis and the state government to provide 500 acres of land to each adivasi family. The figure of C.K Janu as an adivasi woman leading the cause has given the movement a dimension of subaltern identity politics in addition to social justice and ecological balance.

The issues related to the ecological movement are the Bishnois, Chipko movement and ecofeminism, Jainism and ecology, Anti-arrack movement on the other hand, is an instance of women's movement helping their men to overcome addiction. Buddhism and Jainism are deeply rooted in the ethos of Indian people. There were two major ecological movements initiated and participated by women of India. Since, women are concerned with the survival of all life so, they participate in the ecological movements to protect and to restore nature.



Religious teachings help human beings to cultivate an attitude of love, care and respect towards nature. For a peaceful living, a religious teaching not only guides us but also prompts us to act sympathetically towards nature. Religion instills an ecological consciousness amongst people which helps us to live in harmony with nature. The survey of the views of Jaina and Buddhist religion provides a reverential attitude towards nature.

India has also been contributing to the field of ecofeminism. After Independence in 1947, several nonviolent movements were born in different regions of India in order to preserve traditional lifestyles, natural environment, resources for subsistence. All of them embodied the values of democracy, decentralization of power, and social movement, non-violent actions, focusing on the most disadvantaged groups: the poor, women, tribal communities, and peasants. Capitalism development and the “modernization” theories elaborated during 1950s and 1960s were proposed as the solution to Third World poverty. However, the simplistic dichotomy between traditional societies: rural, underdeveloped and nontraditional societies: urban, progressive on the base of which development projects were implemented, resulted in the continuation of the colonial project, this time carried out by internal actors instead of colonial masters.

The Indian activist Vandana Shiva, who became spokesperson of Indian ecofeminism, is quite prominent. Her environmental activism and disapproval of Western development theories were born from a personal experience in one leading environmental movements in postcolonial India, the Chipko. Chipko movement opposed the dismantling of centuries-old traditions in local resource management, in the context of Himalayan mountainous regions. Vandana Shiva has a complex struggle against not only a predominant model originating from the patriarchal scientific thought of the West, but also a struggle against those who deny a scientific basis to her theories. Her work aimed at going beyond prejudices that relegate tribal knowledge to mystical and supernatural spheres, and gave new dignity to those who are able to protect their natural environment with sustainable production practices.

Women’s domination and nature exploitation are closely interlinked. In a gender hierarchy based on patriarchal systems, women are associated to nature and men to culture. Due to connection and closeness between women and nature, the former have an interest in halting the nature exploitation. Both feminist and environmental movements aim at the abolition of inequalities and sustainable growth.

Ecofeminism is a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. It emerged in the mid-1970s alongside second-wave feminism and the green movement. Ecofeminism brings together elements of the feminist and green movements, while at the same time offers a challenge to both. It takes from the green movement a concern for the impact of human activities on the non-human world and from feminism the view of humanity as gendered in ways that subordinate, exploit and oppress women.

Ecofeminism a 'new term for an ancient wisdom' grew out of various social movements - the feminist, peace and ecology movements - in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Though the term was first used by Francoise D’Eaubonne, it became popular only in the context of numerous protests and activities against environmental destruction, sparked-off initially by recurring ecological disasters. The meltdown at Three Mile Island prompted large number of



women in the USA to come together in the first ecofeminist conference - 'Women and Life on Earth: A Conference on Eco-Feminism in the Eighties' in March 1980, at Amherst. At this conference the connections between feminism and militarization, healing and ecology were explored. Ynestra King (1980:37) one of the Conference organizers wrote:

Ecofeminism is about connectedness and wholeness of theory and practice. It asserts the special strength and integrity of every living thing. For us the snail darter is to be considered side by side with a community's need for water, the porpoise side by side with appetite for tuna, and the creatures it may fall on with Skylab. We are a woman-identified movement and we believe we have a special work to do in these imperil 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. It is the masculinist mentality which would deny us our right to our own bodies and our own sexuality, and which depends on multiple systems of dominance and state power to have its way.

There is no single definition of ecofeminism, Ecofeminists agree that the domination of women and the domination of nature are fundamentally connected and environmental efforts are therefore integral with work to overcome the oppression of women. The primary aims of ecofeminism are not the same as those typically associated with liberal feminism. Ecofeminists do not seek equality with men as such, but aim for liberation of women as women. Central to this liberation is recognition of the values of the activities traditionally associated with women: childbirth, nurturing and the whole domestic arena. Some feminists have criticized ecofeminism for reinforcing oppressive stereotypes and for its tendency toward essentialism.

The scientific revolution of the 17th century changed Western society's prevailing view of nature. From an earlier status as a nurturing mother, nature was transformed into a machine to be controlled and repaired by man. Social and economic changes brought by capitalism eroded a peasant and artisan way of life in which men and women worked together in the home. An increasingly industrialized society was dominated by men with domestic life remaining the preserve of the home was unpaid and perceived to be subordinate to men's labor in the market place. Both women and nature were subordinated to the male-driven industrial society. Ecofeminists critic lays stress on any analysis on women's 'special' biological or 'natural' destiny that thwarts the possibilities of liberation.

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