

Eco-feminism: Women and Nature

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1. Introduction

The term “eco-feminism” has been first introduced by French female philosopher Françoise d'Eaubonne in the famous book “Le Feminisme ou la Mort”¹ 1974. It is actually concerned with deep ecology and the concept of gender. Eco-feminism is composed with two terms ecology and feminism. There are different stand points regarding eco-feminism. It tries to construct an environmental ethics by taking into account possible connections between the torturing on women and the torturing on nature. The supporters of this view think that there underlies a similarity between the torturing on women and the torturing on nature, and one can gain a clear understanding of one by acquiring knowledge about the other. This movement gained impetus in the recent decades in the form of innumerable protests against the burning problem of environmental degradation. They think the environmental philosophy which fails to attend to or inculcate the possible connection between the subjugation of women and nature is undoubtedly deficient and incomplete. The interconnectedness between these two can be traced back to the historical past and the shift in the world view from the organic to the mechanistic was the root cause for the degradation of both. In India the Samkhya philosophy also mentioned that Prakrti or Nature has got certain characteristics that are common to woman-in general.

Just as woman can make a person happy, unhappy or infatuated with her three qualities-satta, rajas, and tamas; Prakrti has such characteristics of happiness, misery and infatuation due to having same quality. Ecology and environmental ethics include feminist perspectives holding the link between the exploitation on women and exploitation on nature. Eco-feminism has also inclination to explore linguistic interconnections between oppression on the women class and the oppression on nature; examining sexist-naturist language that represents women, non human animals, and the land as inferior to men identified culture. Men are concerned with culture and women are with nature. Like ‘Vandana Shiva’² many others eco-feminists examined the claim relating to women, children, people of color with various factors about environmental degradation. Eco-feminism sees a parallel between the earth and women. It challenges the power of hierarchies, and points out women’s importantly association in environmental degradation. So, according to philosophical dictionary, eco-feminism is movement based on political philosophy which combines ecological concerns about female.

2. Area

Eco-feminism is a field connecting ecological ethics and feminism that wants to find out the link between torturing on

natural environmental and oppression on women. Ecology is incomplete without feminism, because it does not recognize the necessity of ending the oppression of women; and feminism is disembodied without the ecological perspective, which asserts the interdependence of living things. The primary insight of eco-feminism is that all matters of oppression are interconnected.

It grapples with questions relevant to law, politics, and academia. Some eco-feminism link man’s destructiveness to woman’s reputed capacity to heal in a way that assumes an important link between women and the natural.

It is continuously connecting issues like violence against women, military violence, and degradation of the planet. Everything on the feminist agenda like equal rights, quality of work, child care, reproductive choice, and domestic violence-- is interconnected. It is actually dealing with the following matters---i) eco-feminists seek its eco-centric position and believe that humans must understand their finite dependence on Earth. Due to the influence from ecology, eco-feminists think humans as one feature of a living Earth. The Earth’s biosphere is so interdependent that none of its components can survive, except within a cohesive ecosystem. This establishes the wellbeing of the Earth as a whole as supreme. Each member of the ‘Earth-community’³ is unable to supersede the intertwined needs of the Earth as a whole. Therefore, in the eco-feminism’ stand point, humans are not superior to Earth, just as men are not superior to women, just as the developed world is not superior to the Third World. ii) Eco-feminism link patriarchy with destroying the environment and oppressing women and minorities. Combining the feminist and ecological perspectives, eco-feminism establishes the link between women and nature; the domination, exploitation, and fear of both women and nature are characteristic of patriarchal thinking. Eco-feminists use the feminists’ view of patriarchy and its use of language and laws to control and dominate. They link the domination of women by men, people of color by white people, non-human nature by human beings, and so on. iii) Eco-feminism tries to be inclusive. It is their goal to frame issues in ways that include women of different backgrounds and experience, to enable women to work together across race, class and national lines. In particular, they speak for non-human species, for nature, for future generations, and those humans sidelined from decision making. iv) Eco-feminists look at the work of community activists and grassroots movements which bring about local transformation and value the changes advocated by such groups. What might work to reduce emissions in one country might have the opposite impact in another. The eco-feminist goal is to work with the local population and decide, collectively, what the right solution is for

that community. v) Eco-feminists demonstrate the violation on women and other types of oppression, often unconsciously. In other words, since the random torturing on nature originated in society it, therefore, should be over come in society or by the destruction of society. Under eco-feminism, all forms of oppression intersect, illuminating that the torturing on nature and of women are related. The benefit of eco-feminism is not only looking at gender, but also its link with other forms of oppression.

3. Cause of women's domination

All feminist issues are conceptual. So, eco-feminists protest against logic of domination basis on this conceptual framework. There are three oppressive conceptual characters in this case, such as—

- a) value dualism which admits disjunctive pairs within the biotic community. The disjuncts are oppositional and exclusive. One disjunct possesses higher value and enjoys superiority over other one. Similarly male and female are the disjunctive pairs in the realm of human being. Value dualism confers higher value to male identified with mind and reason than to female identified with body and emotion. These disjunctive pairs make many kinds of oppression like sexual, racial, class etc. all these lead to the logic of foundation which is a basic characteristic of oppressive conceptual framework.
- b) Within the biotic community some species are present as higher value and placed at a higher position than the others. Human beings, of this community enjoy higher value, status and prestige amongst all species of the natural world or in other words they are at the top of the hierarchy. Accordingly, human beings are morally allowed to oppress or subjugate all other species of the biotic world.
- c) The justification of domination is based on some alleged characteristics possessed by certain species of the biotic or natural world. As for example, within the class of human beings, 'rationality' forms the specific characteristic of the masculine mass which empowers them to dominate over the feminine lacking these characteristic, and such domination or oppression is absolutely justified. However, these arguments have been refuted by eco-feminists in several times. They want to find out the link between the exploitation on women and the nature, and claimed that women are closer to nature than men are.

4. Cause of women's closeness to nature than men

- 1) Psychological cause: De Beauvoir argued that physiological structure, development, and functions of the women make them to be closure to nature. Female is the prey of the species. She points out that many major areas and processes of the women's body serve does not function apparently for the health and stability of the individuals due to their specific organic functions, which are often causes of sufferings of pain and danger. Non human beings have no personality; these may be excised at any time of a woman's life. Eco-feminists argue that some ovarian secretions function for the benefit of the egg, promoting its maturation and adapting the uterus to its requirements; in respect to the organism as a whole, those make for 'disequilibrium'⁴ rather than for regulation. Female is adapted to the needs of the egg rather than to her own requirements. Menstruation is uncomfortable and painful. It has negative correlates and involves troublesome job. In pregnancy vitamins and minerals

other things are put into women's body for nourishing the embryo depleting the strength and energy. Childbirth is also a painful and dangerous one.

Besides this, women's body seems to doom their reproduction of life. Male asserts his creativity externally, sometimes, artificially by help of technology. Man creates external transcendent objects where as women creates perishables. Thus male is everywhere associated with culture and female seems to be closer to nature.

- 2) Social role: women's social role is a cause to be closer to nature. Woman's body generates milk during and after pregnancy for the feeding of the newborn baby. The infant is to survive on her mother's breast milk. The baby cannot survive without breast milk or some similar formula at this stage of life. As a mother feeds her breast milk to her baby so there makes a direct relation between mother and baby. Mother takes care her baby and nourishes with affection, this relation between the tow is found as natural bond. The other arrangements of feeding to the other cases are temporary and artificial. Only in this case mother and her baby come together as natural bondage. Besides this, a child cannot have skill enough to engage in major work and cannot realize about various dangers, at that time he seek a constant taking care upon him. The mother takes this duty without any condition, as a natural bond with her baby. She remains rooted in the domestic family group; so, home is only dealing area for women. Women's association with domestic circle leads to be closure to nature.

As women are confined domestic activities so they are identified with lower order of social organizations.

If the specific biological function of the woman is worried, then she will be identified with nature. The family represents lower level. The cultural reasoning seems to hold that, man is the natural creator of religion rituals, law, customs, tradition, politics etc. In this way he must be identified with culture.

- 3) Psychic factor: Women's psychic factors make them closer to nature. They have different body as well as different social locus from man and a different psychic structure is most controversial. Women functionally are more practical and pragmatic, worldly than a man.' The woman represents in subjective way whereas represents in objective way. But this difference is not innate. Women are universally responsible for early child care. The structural situation leads that mother is the early socialize of both boys and girls, both develop with personal identification and defused identification with general personality, behavior traits, values and attitudes. A son must ultimately shift to a masculine role identity, which involves building identification with the father. Since father remains more remote from the baby than a mother, so she gets the chance for making an identity with her baby. This is "positional identification,"⁵ i.e. identification with father's male role as a collection of abstract elements, rather than a personal identification with father as a real individual. For a young girl, it is very easy to have the identity role of women as she remains in touch of her mother. It is created in early infancy, can persist into the process of learning female role identity. As the daughter remains in touch of her mother and follow her mother's role as woman and realise the particular functions

allotted to women, so she learns to act the women's role in the society. Accordingly this pattern makes a girl identified with female class.

5. The relation between women and nature

There are intimate relations or link between women and nature from the different standpoint. Such as--

A) Epistemological link: There is an epistemological touch in the relation between women and nature. Empirical and symbolic women-nature connections motivate the eco-feminism epistemology which challenges main stream view of knowledge and nature of knower. Eco-feminism epistemology must critique rationalism in western philosophical tradition.

B) Ethical link: Women nature connections have also appeared in environmental ethics. There is an inter-link among the women, animals and natural environment, which concerns the feminist ethical analysis and response. The goal of eco-feminist is to develop its theories and practices focusing on random torturing on environment without being gender biased. That is, eco-feminism must care on its appropriate reciprocity; it makes connections with eco feminist animal rights positions, an eco-feminist social ecology, and eco-feminist bio regionalism.

C) Conceptual link: The supremacy on women and the supremacy on the natural environment are locating in conceptual structure that constructs women class and whole natural environment in a gender biased. The value dualism or disjunctive pairs where disjuncts are optional and exclusive attribute higher value. The value dualisms include reason-emotion, mind-body, culture-nature, man-woman dichotomies. According to the scholars, theorists, researchers, things which are historically associated with emotion, nature and women are regarded as inferior to those which are associated with reason, culture, and man. Besides this, the supremacy is also common to the theories like sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism etc. Actually the patriarchal theories explain the subordination

women by men. Oppressive and patriarchal frameworks are characterized by value dualism. Experimental link: With environmental destruction, eco-feminism seeks to link women, children, people of color and underclass.

The link between women and nature is planned to reveal important cultural and spiritual ties to earth. Some scholars claim that women class, children, racial minorities etc. carry the risk factors by the toxins. The first world development policies effect in food, forest, water which directly contribute to the inability of women.

D) Symbolic link: Eco-feminism has been grown up as the alternative spiritual symbol, theology and utopian society. Some theorists focus on language that interiorizes women and natural environment by naturalizing women feminizing nature, such as sex gender language uses to describe 'mother nature'. Nature is also used in female sexual terms. Such as the nature is "raped", dominated, conquered, ruled, and mined. Secrets of natural environment are pierced and her "womb" is taken into the services of science. Similarly fertile soil is cultivated and the land that lies "fallow" is "barren", or useless. That is, the language feminizes nature and naturalizes the whole class of women. It describes, reflects, and perpetuates the domination of women and nature including animals.

E) Political link: Eco-feminism are doing political movement from the grass root level by presenting pragmatic concern. The variety of eco-feminism perspectives on the environment are properly seen as an attempt to take grass root activism and political concerns by developing analysis of domination.

6. Conclusion

So, in the conclusion it can be said that the entire women class has been supposed as material objects traditionally. It cannot be denied that the women are more closed to nature than men for having the immense tolerance of both nature and women.

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End note:

9. *Le Feminisme ou la Mort*: it is a name of book written in French, in English it is *Feminism or Death*
10. Vandana Shiva: Vanda Shiva is an Indian environmental activist who was born on 5th November 1952. Currently she one of the leaders and board members of the international forum on globalization.
11. *Earth community*: all the creatures of the earth
12. *Disequilibrium*: imbalance or coach
13. *Positional identification*: it is an identification with father's male which makes distinct male from female.
14. *Virgin timber*: Virginal membranes