



VIDHYAYANA

ISSN 2454-8596
www.MyVedant.com

An International Multidisciplinary Research E-Journal

**CHARACTERISTICS OF ECO-FEMINISM IN GENERAL
WITH A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO INDIA**

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Abstract

'Eco-feminism' is a new and under developing critical theory which studies the correlations between women and nature. It is one of the many branches of eco-criticism which studies and critically analyzes the relations between humans and nature. As 'Encyclopedia Britannica' puts it, "'Eco-feminism', which is also called 'ecological feminism', is a branch of feminism that studies the connections and relations between women and nature." Eco-feminism depicts movements and school of thoughts that connects feminism with eco system in one or other way. Eco-feminism describes human being's exploitation of nature and human being's unnecessary interruption over ecology in the name of so called 'urbanization', 'globalization' and 'development'. Eco-feminism works on the belief that there is commonness between the exploitation of nature and the exploitation of women by the same phallogocentric society. In the present scenario prevailing in the world, it has become essential to preserve the mother earth and the Mother Nature. Eco-feminism also puts stress upon preserving the nature. Especially the plight of the whole world due to Covid-19 is an eye opener for all of us. During this lockdown period, when most of the human activities which takes place in the name of so called 'globalization' and 'development' and which are dangerous for the Mother Nature are restricted; it can be observed that the Mother Nature has bloomed at its best. This observation or fact is enough to indicate how human race is exploiting and harming the Mother Nature for their selfish purposes.

If we observe from Indian perspectives, India is enormously blessed by nature and the worshipping of nature and natural elements has remained an integral part of every Indian's life since ancient times. In this research paper an endeavor has been made to throw light on the characteristics and emergence of eco-feminism in the context of the world in general and in the context of India in particular. The present paper will help into get acquainted with the theory, emergence and characteristics of eco-feminism.

Key words: Eco-feminism, eco-criticism, nature-women correlations, exploitation of nature

Introduction

The word Eco-feminism consists of two words; Eco (Ecology) and feminism. The term, 'Eco-feminism' was initially used by the French feminist writer Francoise d'Eaubone in her book, 'Le Feminisme ou la Mort' (Feminism or death) in 1974. According to her, eco-



feminism is concerned with the exploitation and domination of all marginalized groups including women, children, poor etc. to the exploitation and domination of the nature including animals, land, water, earth, forests etc.

From ages, the nature and natural objects like water, tress, the sun, the moon, stars, wind, forests etc. are being worshiped by the people of various cultures of the whole universe. But in present situation, with the explosion of population and because of human beings' infinite greed for materialistic pleasure, in the name of so called "urbanization", "modernization", "industrialization" and "development, Mankind is destructing the whole eco system by unnecessarily interrupting it. Eco-feminists are against the oppression and exploitation of women and natural resources. Eco-feminism puts stress on ending each and every kind of oppression and exploitation.

Eco-feminism has developed and still developing in different stages. As Chen Ling puts it in 'Ecological Criticism Based on Social Gender: The Basic Principles of Eco-feminism', Eco-feminism is developed in three stages: "The first stage is the beginning of the 1960s. It's mainly demonstrated that the American women challenged large nuclear power stations, the Chipko movement in northern India and green belt movement in Kenya. The movement at this stage is based on the general ecological awareness in working women's daily life, and attempts to combine the expression of women's interests with the pursuit of environment maintenance and protection. The second stage is taken from 1970s to 1980s. This is a stage that the concepts and theories of ecofeminism have initially formed. The third stage is taken from the 1980s until the present. This is a stage that ecofeminist theory has established and developed."

Further it should be also noted that, "Eco-feminism began as a movement in 1980, when the first eco-feminist conference, "Women and Life on Earth: Ecofeminism in 1980 was organized at Amherst, Massachusetts." In comparison with other theories, eco-feminism is generally regarded as a recent development that combines feminism and ecology to study women-nature correlation.

Initially, eco-feminism was being discussed in the non-fictional writings of several authors. As Subhrasleta Banerjee puts it in her research paper titled as ' Ecofeminism and Atwood's Surfacing: A Re-Reading',

“Eco-feminism came to be explored and discussed first in non-fictional writings with the U.S. author Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) (Warren 168), Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) and Terry Tempest Williams’ *Refuge* (1991).”

Further, she also observes about early or initial eco-feminist literature that “the U.S. author Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Moving the Mountain* (1911), Toni Morrison’s *Sula* (1973), and Alice Walker’s *The Colour Purple* (1982), for example, could be cited as early specimens of eco-feminism in the world literature.”

Many theorists, writers and activists across the world has tried to contribute something to the growth and development of eco-feminism through their works. Among the prominent theorists of eco-feminism, some names are of core importance at world level such as Judi Bari, Francoise d’Eaubonne, Greta Gaard, Carolyn Merchant, Merry Mellor, Val Plumwood, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Karen Warren, Vandana Shiva etc.

General Characteristics of Eco-feminism

After observing eco-feminism’s meaning and emergence at a glance. We can indicate some basic and general characteristics of eco-feminism. First of all, eco-feminism works on the belief that both nature and women are identical. Eco-feminists believe that women and nature shares some qualities in common like correlativity, nurturing and cooperation. Further, it also shows inter connection between ‘menstruation and moon cycles, childbirth and creation’ etc. The theory of eco-feminism utilizes the age-old inter connection between women and nature as a link to unite both the feminism and the ecological movements which stresses upon ending each and every kind of oppression or exploitation of women and nature.

Further, it should be also noted that, Eco-feminism is not only a women’s movement but is also a social movement. Eco-feminists propagates that it is not only immoral to dominate, exploit and oppress women but it is also immoral to destroy and exploit natural resources for satisfying one’s greed for materialistic pleasures.

From ages, the nature and natural objects like water, tress, the sun, the moon, stars, wind, forests etc. are being worshipped by the people of various cultures of the whole universe. But in present situation, with the explosion of population and because of human beings’ infinite greed for materialistic pleasure, in the name of so called “urbanization”,



“modernization”, “industrialization” and “development, Mankind is destructing the whole eco system by unnecessarily interrupting it. Eco-feminists are against the oppression and exploitation of women and natural resources. Eco-feminism puts stress on ending each and every kind of oppression and exploitation.

Characteristics of Eco-feminism from Indian Perspective

When talking about India or any under developing nation, it is very important to know about eco-feminism to understand the masculine powers’ invasion over both women and nature. India, India is immensely blessed by nature and the worshipping of nature and natural elements has remained an integral part of every Indian’s life since ancient times.

Since primitive ages, Indian society has remained preserver and worshiper of various elements of nature like the sun, the moon, the earth various plants, rivers etc and has considered the nature and natural elements having supreme powers. Indian culture and ancient Indian texts like Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Aranyakas, The Mahabharata, The Ramayana, Bhagvad Gita etc presents plenty of references of nature worshipping. Plenty of Hindu recites Sanskrit Shlokas daily to show their respect and gratitude towards rivers, mountains, tress, animals and the earth. For example, the earth has been considered as a mother in Indian culture. Apart from the earth, many of the elements of nature are given feminine identity and attributes in Hindu tradition. For example, rivers, the Mother Nature, the plant of Tulsi etc..On the other hand, women are also being highly honored, being considered as goddess and respected in Indian culture.

Thus, both women and nature has been worshipped in India, yet they both are often being neglected and marginalized by the masculine powers and phallocentric society. Especially in the present situation, with the explosion of population and because of human being’ infinite greed for materialistic pleasure, in the name of so called “urbanization”, “modernization”, “industrialization” and “development, Mankind is destructing the whole eco system by unnecessarily interrupting it. the male dominated society in Indian culture has marginalized nature as well as women for fulfillment of their needs since the ancient times.

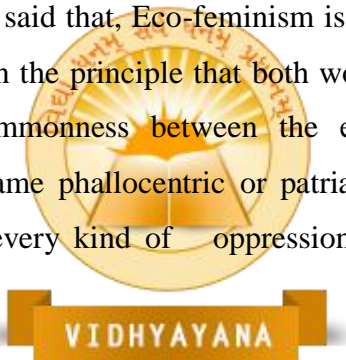
Basically, eco-feminism in India is having its roots in “Chipko Movement” which took place in 1970s in the Garhwal region of Uttaranchal in Uttar Pradesh. This movement is now referred as one of the early and effective specimen of ecological or eco-feminist



movements in India. Apart from this Chipko movement, many other environmental movements laid by environmental activists, theorists and writers like Medha Patkar, Mahasweta Devi, Arundhati Roy, C.K.Janu, Vandana Shiva, Meera Nanda, Bina Agrawal, Shobhita Jain, and Ramchandra Guha have also contributed to the field of eco-feminism in India. If we talk about the recent times, an Indian environmentalist from Karnataka, Saalumarada Thimmakka, arrived in the lime light for her notable work of planting around 8000 tress in her life span. Because of her utmost dedication towards the Mother Nature, she became popular as “Vruksh Mata” (Hindi for mother of tress) Her this dedication towards nature is also being recognized by the government of India and she has also got Padma Shri (The fourth-highest civilian award in the Republic of India) in 2019

Conclusion

Thus, to sum up it can be said that, Eco-feminism is comparatively a new theoretical development which is based upon the principle that both women and nature are identical. It also believes that there is commonness between the exploitation of nature and the exploitation of women by the same phallogocentric or patriarchal society and eco-feminism stresses upon ending each and every kind of oppression or exploitation of women and nature.



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ISSN 2454-8596
www.MyVedant.com

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