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Ecofeminism in Indian Literature: Investigating the Interaction among Women, Environment, and Resistance

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Abstract

As framed in Western debate, ecofeminism mostly investigates the ideological connections between gender and environmental issues. But in India, ecofeminism permeates the socioeconomic reality of caste and class, therefore influencing women's opposition to environmental damage. Situating the debate within the Indian environmental movement, this research critically analyzes the basic ideas of ecofeminism and the criticisms related to it. Examining grassroots movements like the Chipko Movement and Narmada Bachao Andolan helps this study show how women, especially from underprivileged areas, have been in the vanguard of ecological resistance, usually tying their survival to environmental justice. Discussed in the research is the degree to which the movement of Indian women has addressed environmental problems and whether including these topics will improve its inclusiveness and potency. On the other hand, it looks at the possible advantages for the environmental movement in using a feminist lens to handle gender aspects of ecological damage. The paper seeks to expose the intricate interactions of caste, class, and gender inside Indian ecofeminism, so providing suggestions on how a more integrated approach could enhance both environmental and feminist activity in the nation.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Women, Indian Literature, Environment

1. Introduction

Although the idea of ecofeminism has been around for a while, it is still relatively new. Up until now, a clearly Euro-American perspective has dominated the related disciplines of ecofeminism and ecocriticism; neither area fully addresses the challenge of ecofeminism, where both professions need to acknowledge "the "double-bind" of colonization and femininity." Combining ecocriticism and ecofeminism into a single analytical field, an

ecofeminist perspective would emphasize the tight ties between conceptions of class, caste, color, colonialism, and neo-colonialism and the exploitation of the environment and the oppression of women.

In discourses of purity concerning natural literature and criticism, colonial women have been "repeatedly naturalized as objects of heritage to be owned, preserved, or patronized rather than as subjects of their own land and legacies". To challenge colonialism attitudes of social and environmental supremacy as well as continuous imperialist tendencies, it is therefore imperative to unite feminist with environmental issues. Examining several postcolonial countries—including those in Africa and South Asia, particularly India—we discover that they have lengthy history of environmental activism and movements going back before ecofeminism gained acceptance as a legitimate academic field in the West.

- **Women directed Environmental Activism and Literature in India**

Currently considered as a shining example of grassroots environmental activism in India, the Chipko movement enjoys legendary significance there. Equally important is the manner this movement mobilized women. This campaign aimed to fight mining, logging, and deforestation, so developing the concept of tree-hugs. The movement began in the Uttaranchal Garhwal region of Uttar Pradesh, India. The state's expanding commercialization and underdevelopment of the Garhwal area, where state-level policies like granting private contractors harvest rights for the trees to create cricket bats had an influence on local women, helped to construct this movement in some part. Extensive deforestation resulted in the most disastrous flood and equally destructive landslides of 1970.

Other women who have spearheaded environmental campaigns and causes in more recent years include C.K. Janu, Mahasweta Devi, Arundhati Roy, and Medha Patkar. The Narmada Bachao Andolan is a group of people, lead by Medha Patkar, who are against building the Sardar Sarovar Dam across the Narmada River in Gujarat, India. It is made up of farmers, indigenous people, tribe people, environmentalists, and people who fight for human rights. A famous feminist author and activist, Mahasweta Devi has spent a lot of time working to make the lives of Indian tribal people and their surroundings better through her writing and action. Winner of the Booker Prize, Arundhati Roy, wrote "The God of Small Things." She uses her writing to support causes like the Narmada Bachao Andolan, India's nuclear tests, and the rebels' demand for Azadi (independence) in Kashmir. The most recent woman to get respect for her work to protect the environment is C.K. Janu, an Adivasi woman who has lived in the Muthanga forests of North Kerala since 2003. In protest, this was done because the state government broke the Adivasi-Adivasi deal that said each Adivasi family should get 500 acres of land.

The movement has taken on a subaltern identity politics aspect thanks to C.K. Janu, an Adivasi woman who is leading the cause. Its main goals are social fairness and environmental balance.

Astonishingly, the majority of India's ecocritical works and activity are left out of the canon of environmental literature in light of these developments. In general, the ecocritical community has paid little attention to activists and women who write postcolonial Indian fiction in English. The importance of women writers to this project must then be argued. In addition to examining female subjectivity to create an identity that is not forced by a patriarchal culture, many Indian women authors continue to be popular because they frequently incorporate social themes into their works. Literature produced by Indian women, especially from the 20th century forward, is increasingly acknowledged as a powerful medium for feminism and modernism. The prominence of Indian women writers in the English-speaking literary sphere, shown by Kiran Desai and Arundhati Roy, is undeniable, since they have garnered international acclaim through prestigious awards such as the Booker Prize. Contemporary Indian women writers are increasingly articulating their concerns with globalization in India and its impact on gender norms, familial structures, and the environment at large.

Women's ambivalent interactions with their surroundings in Indian fiction we now discuss the environment and women who write Indian fiction in English. This section will explore the significance of analyzing postcolonial ecofeminism in the writings of Indian women authors and the contributions these writers make to the theory, ideology, and material conditions of women in relation to the environment. No other Indian female author has been referenced in relation to ecofeminism, save Arundhati Roy. Consequently, starting with Roy, the deterioration of the fictitious community of Ayemenem reflects and parallels the moral downfall of the characters in the broader narrative, especially the Ipe family. The caste and gender discrimination faced by Ammu and Velutha in Kerala, alongside the History House and the pollution of the Meenachal River, exemplify ecological exploitation. As Baby Kochamma epitomizes the strict enforcement of societal norms and love laws, Ammu remains steadfast in her hope for a brighter future, which also serves as the concluding theme of the narrative. Baby Kochamma reacts unfavorably to the inter-caste relationship due to her mourning over the priest's affection and subsequent loss. Notably, she claims to be an ornamental gardener, and when she starts living her life vicariously through television, her garden is in ruins. The sibling incest occurs against this backdrop, which Roy uses throughout the book as a chilling reminder of the macabre.

Earlier feminist authors like Kamala Markandya and Anita Desai wrote on women and the environment even before Roy's book became an enormous hit. These authors write about women's private and particular lives, but they also make strong political statements about societal issues and Indian culture as a whole. One reason why women writers in this area are sometimes disregarded and not given much attention is because of their emphasis

on the particular and the private. Desai's Fire on the Mountain and Markandya's Nectar in a Sieve illustrate the more sinister aspects of nature and the simultaneous existence of women's darker dimensions. In Markandya's narrative, Rukmini and her family nearly succumb to famine due to a drought and erratic environmental conditions. Rukmini accepts the lot assigned to her, although due to their dire financial circumstances, her daughter Ira is forced into prostitution. In Desai's novel, Ila Das is violently raped in the obscurity of the fields intended to sustain life. Raka, who ultimately ignites the forest, epitomizes the horrors that the women in Desai's novel experience.

Recent literature examining women's engagement with urbanization, advancement, and the city encompasses Usha K.R.'s Monkey-Man, Mehta's A River Sutra, Anuradha Roy's An Atlas of Impossible Longing, and Abdulali's The Madwoman of Jogare. The city provides women with choices that echo the globalization discourse of equal opportunity for all. The dichotomy of nature and culture is irreconcilable with such associations. The shift from rural to urban environments illustrates that postcolonial ecofeminism is not a fixed ideology confined to rural or wilderness contexts. The urban setting serves as a backdrop for both creativity and devastation, as these novels illustrate through the inclusion of urban paranoia and madness, which reflect responses to the pressures of globalization and development. The body of development and ecofeminist theory is subsequently enriched by Indian women's literature concerning the relationships between women and the environment. The works of these female authors contest the notion that women and the environment are simplistic, uniform categories, particularly in relation to the strain of cultural ecofeminism and Vandana Shiva. These works present the environment and women in a favorable and unfavorable light. Particularly in the Indian setting or the Third World in general, the uncritical acceptance of the woman-nature link is not valid. These authors demonstrate how to challenge the notion that women have "naturally" positive attitudes toward the environment because they are the ones most impacted by environmental degradation.

Regarding women's material status as ecological citizens and the recognition of their care labor, which inherently links women to environmental stewardship, gender inclusivity necessitates the transformation of the rigid dualism of nature and culture into a more dynamic and dialectical interplay between the two aspects of the binary. Concepts that challenge nature/culture dichotomies and deconstruct dualism independently encompass women's (ecological) citizenship and women's labor. The nature/culture dualism, among several operational dualisms in theory and practice, overlooks the pluralistic concept of gendered ecological citizenship and the female citizen as a multi-identity inhabitant. The city and urban environs have significant implications for women as residents and their rights to the city and its vicinity.

The Appiko Movement in Karnataka emerged for similar reasons. Appiko, which translates as "hug" in Kannada, was created in reaction to the deforestation in Karnataka's Uttar Kannada district. Since the 1950s, the state government's policy of establishing plywood companies and hydroelectric forests in place of mixed forests with eucalyptus plantings has caused water resources to dry up and consequent poverty. In September 1983, the men, women, and children of Kalese Forest, led by Pandurang Hegde, embraced the trees to prevent their felling. The Appiko Movement raised awareness of the perils of overusing the delicate environment and established the groundwork for a campaign to rescue the Western Ghats.

It subsequently diminished the need on firewood and promoted sustainable environmental practices by advocating for fuel-efficient stoves, biogas facilities, renewable energy, and organic agriculture. Comparable initiatives have been motivated by the green movement initiated by Appiko in Maharashtra and throughout the southern states. The Appiko Movement, which may be considered an ecofeminist movement while being led by a man, saw women have an active and essential part in preserving the ecosystem. Around 2001–2003, C K Janu, a woman with limited literacy who had been exposed to Leftist politics in her early years as a CPM member, fought for the Adivasi rights to the forest in the south. When a sanctuary was established in the 1960s, the tribes that lived in the Muthanga Forest were forced to leave. The tribal people risked starving deaths in 2001 after being deprived of their customary means of subsistence and receiving neither land nor compensation for their rehabilitation. C K Janu and Geethanandan have organized a 48-hour sit-in protest in front of the state secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram. She compelled her Adivasi brethren to construct huts in Muthanga after previous efforts had no results. A multitude of Adivasis were killed and severely injured due to police brutality and oppression. Intoxicated elephants were unleashed upon them, and their houses were ignited. Despite the imprisonment of Janu and Geethaqandan, the adverse media coverage incited significant unrest, compelling the government to allocate land to the Adivasis and form a cooperative farm.

Janu, a member of the Ravula or Adiya clan (denoting 'slave' in Malayalam), possessed minimal political experience with the CPM. She resigned from the party upon recognizing that the political leaders exhibited minimal regard for the welfare of Dalits and Adivasis. She always avoided abstract political dogmas, yet anything she accomplished was a result of her experiences as an Adivasi, therefore it is possible that the socialist philosophy impacted her. She had advanced as an organic leader of the Adivasis due to practical concerns about survival and means of subsistence.

We can correctly claim that Janu, who is often hailed as "Mother Forest," is an ambivalent but effective ecofeminist. Dalit women in Andhra Pradesh's Medak district have launched a similar campaign. Like the Chipko Movement, this one was started by a man named Dr. P V Satheesh and several academic associates.

Because they farmed the land, the local women in the area were aware of its faults. The women addressed their lack of funds to develop their difficult-to-work-on infertile wastelands by forming a cooperative with Dr. Satheesh's assistance. They started cultivating millets instead of rice or wheat, and they were able to support themselves. In order to meet their farming needs, these women founded the Deccan Development Society, which now operates a seed bank, a community radio, and a rationing system that distributes millet in lieu of cash based on each villager's financial situation. Millets were given away for free by the village's elderly, impoverished, and sick residents. None of the aforementioned domestic ecofeminists had any knowledge of political ideologies or dogmas. The widespread exploitation and deprivation they witnessed around them had an impact on their words, attitudes, and actions. They attempted to combat injustice and guarantee a dignified existence for the community by banding together.

2. Various Views on Ecofeminism

Various methodologies for analyzing the connections between women and nature, the essence of women's subjugation and its solutions, the theory of human nature, and the principles of freedom, equality, and epistemology that inform diverse feminist theories are all encapsulated in the distinct manifestations of ecofeminism.

Ecofeminist philosophy has been divided into liberal, radical, and socialist frameworks by some feminist researchers, such as Carolyn Merchant (1992). But prominent forms of feminism haven't really explained where they stand on ecology or the relationship between the twin oppressions of nature and women. As a means of achieving a fulfilling life, the feminist movement of the 1960s called for equality for women in the workplace and in school. The worry regarding life on Earth emerged concurrently with the publication of Rachel Carson's 1962 book Silent Spring, which highlighted the ramifications of pollution on both human and non-human realms.

Liberal ecofeminists, along with liberal feminists, assert that the swift exhaustion of natural resources and inadequate control of pesticides and other environmental pollutants are the root causes of environmental problems. An ecologically sustainable social production can surmount this challenge. Enhanced scientific research, conservation efforts, and legislative measures are required for this matter. Women can engage in occupations in science, natural resource conservation, law, and other domains on par with men if they have equitable educational opportunities. Consequently, by the implementation of new norms and regulations, these ecofeminists want to transform human interactions with environment. The escalating problem of environmental degradation cannot be addressed solely by the education of women as attorneys and environmental scientists.

Ecofeminists do not challenge the primary catalyst of environmental degradation, which is the entire development process.

Radical ecofeminists analyzed environmental concerns via their critique of patriarchy and suggested alternatives aimed at liberating both women and nature, in reaction to the association of women with nature, both of which are devalued in Western culture (Merchant 1990, p. 93).

This perspective is derived from Sherry Ortner's renowned 1974 article, Is Female to Male what Nature is to Culture? Ecofeminists venerate the connection between women and nature by promoting ancient rituals centered on the Mother Goddess, the moon, animals, and the female reproductive system. A burgeoning patriarchal civilization including male deities, to whom female deities were subordinate, supplanted this prehistoric era characterized by goddess worship.

The Scientific Revolution of the 17th century further degraded nature by substituting the nurturing earth with the "metaphor of a machine to be controlled and repaired from outside... The earth is to be dominated by male-developed and controlled technology, science, and industry" (Merchant 1992, p. 191).

Consequently, these ecofeminists contest the prevalent notion that women's connection to the environment is restricted by their reproductive capabilities. Women's biology and nature are regarded as sources of power that merit reverence.

- **Ecofeminist Thought Schools**

The claim that ideology has no influence on India is untrue. The underlying philosophy of this struggle for justice has been attempted to be expressed by academics and activists. Currently, there exist two primary schools of ecofeminist philosophy. The socialist school, spearheaded by Martha Mies and Vandana Shiva, perceives environmental degradation as an inescapable consequence of the global patriarchal capitalist-colonial framework. Vandana Shiva, an active participant in the Chipko Movement during the 1970s, has emphasized the connection between women and the environment due to their daily interactions, particularly in subsistence economies. These women are archives of ecological knowledge and have long created prosperity in collaboration with nature. To the detriment of all humanity, the contemporary patriarchal mindset disregards these women and such information. The more comprehensive 'feminist environmental' viewpoint of Bina Agarwal represents the other school of ecofeminism in India.

The philosophies of Vandana Shiva, Mahashweta Devi, and Medha Patkar are shaped by socialist thought. Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India (1988), authored by Indian scientist and environmental activist Vandana Shiva, encapsulates the burgeoning worldwide essence of ecofeminism throughout the 1980s.

Shiva associates "maldevelopment," a term she employs to describe the proliferation of Western, intensive agriculture in the "Third World," with the "demise of the feminine principle." Mahashveta Devi has utilized her literary oeuvre to illuminate the systemic failures in delivering justice and the deficiencies in a development paradigm that neglects the forest-dwelling populations of the tribal regions of undivided Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and West Bengal. In contrast, Vandana Shiva has articulated her environmental concerns and catalyzed the organic movement, exemplified by her Navada project. The poverty and despair these areas depict for every visitor are disturbingly reflected in her writings. The Leftist movement had a significant impact on Mahashweta Devi's work as a journalist, author, and scholar. She became aware of the appalling exploitation of tribal people and bonded labor during her trips to the interior of India. Through her writing and the publication of the periodical Bortika (The Lamp) for over 20 years, she has been championing transformation. The journal publishes works from tribal authors. She recently led the organization of protests against the West Bengal (CPM) government's policy of appropriating arable land for commercial development. This aligned with her advocacy for the underprivileged spanning numerous decades.

A strong mother instinct and a desire to care for and defend India's forest peoples are evident in her works like Aranyer adhikar (Rights to the Forest) and Chhoto Munda o tar tir (Little Munda and his arrow). Yes, this is ecofeminism with socialist overtones. Additionally, Medha Patkar has coordinated her efforts to oppose the practice of successive governments annexing the land of the silent forest inhabitants in the name of the general welfare without providing any funding for the disadvantaged people's rehabilitation or compensation. All three ladies have attempted, in their own unique ways, to express a strong protest and find answers to the devastation of Mother Earth.

The more inclusive ecological feminism advocated by Bina Agarwal and Meera Nanda is the other school of ecofeminism in India. The biases in the gathering of national-level data and, consequently, the formulation of policies have drawn special criticism from Bina Agarwal. The majority of inheritance and ceiling laws in the nation are still extremely gender biased, despite the Constitution's guarantee that there will be no sex-based discrimination as a basic right. She contends that undercounting of women leads to policies that have a direct and significant impact on women's economic and legal standing. Meera Nanda has been especially critical of caste, class, and other elements that significantly impact women's access to available resources. For the sake of women and the ecology on which they must rely for their livelihoods, she has been outspoken in her calls for more inclusivity in developmental policy. To understand the two principal schools of ecofeminist thought, it is essential to recognize the multifaceted character of the Indian environmental movement, which Ramchandra Guha categorizes into Crusading Gandhian, Ecological Marxist, Appropriate Technology, and, more recently,

Scientific Conservation and Wilderness Enthusiasts. Recognizing the shortcomings of the current development model is a commonality among these streams. While some of these support a return to the Gandhian, pre-industrial vision, others support a drastic departure from tradition. It goes without saying that few people are realistic enough to support the best aspects of both tradition and modernity. While Bina Agarwal, Vandana Shiva, and Medha Patkar possess insights into the Indian context, their philosophy is overly urban-centric to sufficiently elucidate the many elements influencing rural India. This has long been acknowledged by the pragmatic women who led movements across this vast nation, resulting in their scorn for dogmas, even when they are acquainted with them.

The realities of class and caste distinctions, as well as the subtleties of sexism and injustice that imprison our women and keep them from accessing the resources necessary to generate prosperity, cannot be adequately explained by an intellectual straitjacket. In order to comprehend Indian reality, ecofeminism will require a new conceptual framework. We cannot create a "feminism" that can keep pace with our ecological movement or movements until then.

3. Criticisms of Ecofeminism

The ecofeminist viewpoint is "ethnocentric, essentialist, blind to class, ethnicity, and other differentiating cleavages, ahistorical, and neglects the material sphere," as noted by a number of feminist scholars, including Cecile Jackson (1993), Janet Biehl (1991), Meera Nanda (1991), and Bina Agarwal (1992).

According to ecofeminist literature, women and nature have historically been exploited and dominated together, and both are viewed as victims of progress. It is assumed that, due to the perception of women being more closely aligned with nature than men, any damage inflicted upon nature adversely impacts women as well. No ecofeminist literature endeavors to substantiate this correlation with empirical facts or persuasive logic. It regards its perspective as axiomatic and is predominantly anecdotal. It mainly ascribes the dominance of women and nature to ideology, neglecting the gender division of labor and the allocation of opportunities, as well as the "interconnected material sources of dominance rooted in economic advantage and political power" (Agarwal 1992, p. 122). The patriarchal expectations of women's roles are perpetuated by these ecofeminist portrayals of women. Rather of acknowledging the complete range of women's human potential and abilities, they "...constrain women to the roles of solely caring and nurturing individuals" (Biehl 1991, p. 15). "Rather than empowering women, the use of metaphors that depict women as "nurturing"—like the earth—and the earth as female are regressive" (Biehl 1991, pp. 17-19). All they do is strengthen preconceptions.

Concepts of sex, culture, and nature are "historically and socially constructed and vary across and within cultures and periods," which these arguments appear to ignore (Agarwal 1992, p. 123). Women are portrayed as a homogenous group by this essentialism, both within and between nations. According to Agarwal (1992, p. 122), it "fails to differentiate among women by class, race, ethnicity, and so on." Ecofeminist essentialism fails to elucidate the evolution of civilization throughout time. Critics like Susan Prentice (1998) argue that emphasizing the distinctive relationship between women and the environment and politics suggests that men's contributions to the world are detrimental, unlike those of women, and that males are equally capable of fostering an environmental ethic. Additionally, capitalism and its dominance on nature are not analyzed. Because it ultimately polarizes and essentializes the worlds of men and women, it is unable to create a successful reform plan.

But according to Merchant (1992, p. 194), ecofeminists operating within the socialist paradigm view nature and the human nature as "socially constructed, rooted in an analysis of race, class, and gender." It might offer a more in-depth analysis of the dominance problem. Beyond the radicals, this ecofeminism focuses over dialectical linkages between "production and reproduction, and between production and ecology" in order to critique capitalist patriarchy (Merchant 1992, pp. 195-197).

Historically, women's profound comprehension of nature has facilitated the perpetuation of life. Colonial incursion and capitalist expansion affected production in traditional societies. Consequently, women were increasingly relegated to the domestic sphere, where they essentially managed the reproduction of the labor force and social connections, while men dominated the production of exchange commodities within a capitalist economy. Reproduction is subordinated to production within the capitalistic system, and environmental sustainability is disregarded. However, under socialism, manufacturing serves to meet needs rather than avarice. This ecofeminist perspective holds that the objectives of capitalism would be inverted in the shift to socialist ecology, with a focus on nature and reproduction rather than production. Consequently, these ecofeminists focus on the reproduction of life itself. This perspective primarily emphasizes environmental concerns affecting women in the working class. However, these ecofeminists often encompass women and assert that they possess a greater affinity for nature. In addition to numerous marginalized races and classes, they also perceive women as a marginalized category. Nevertheless, they standardize the category of women in the process. They neglect to acknowledge that women's experiences differ based on their caste, class, race, ethnicity, and additional characteristics. Despite these limitations, socialist ecofeminists has significantly greater potential for advancing their analysis of the interplay between gender and the environment compared to the other two ecofeminist perspectives.

Both advocates and detractors of ecofeminism have expressed their dissent. Certain feminists distance themselves from ecofeminism, contending that it is inherently essentialist because of the perceived and cultivated strong association between women and nature in some ecofeminist viewpoints. Essentialism posits that individuals belonging to a particular race, gender, or category possess shared historical and cultural traits.While certain forms of feminism and ecofeminism appear to uphold essentialism, many others argue against all such essentialist conceptions. The "tension" between the "deconstructive politics of feminism and the assertions, or constructions of unified identity that feminists are frequently called upon to make on behalf of the category 'women' which gives the project its political specificity" is explained by Kate Nash in her 1994 essay "The Feminist Production of Knowledge: Is Deconstruction a Practice for Women?" which was published in Feminist Review (75–76).

- **Alternative Theories: Environmental Feminism**

Ina Agarwal's "feminist environmental" point of view. The point of view is based on material things, and it says that the way production, reproduction, and distribution are set up by gender and class (caste or race) shapes the relationship between women and nature. Bina Agarwal wrote in 1992 that women's relationships with the environment have changed over time and in different social settings. Women are active in campaigns to protect and restore the environment, and they are also victims of environmental damage, especially in rural homes where people don't have much money. There are good and bad ways that they affect the environment. If you think that women naturally care about protecting the environment because they are the ones who are most affected by environmental damage, then you should not believe that this link between women and nature is real. In India and most of Asia and Africa, forests and town commons provide many things that people need, such as food, fuel, animal feed, manure, building materials, medicinal herbs, resin, gum, honey, and more. Village commons (VC) are an essential source of food and fuel for the underprivileged. VCs provide more than 69 percent of their feed needs and 91 percent of their firewood needs (Agarwal 1992). Income disparities between impoverished and affluent households are lessened when VCs are accessible. For indigenous groups in particular, the forests are a vital source of income. According to studies, around 30 million Indians rely heavily on forests and forest products (Kulkarni 1983). During famines, droughts, and lean agricultural seasons, there is a greater reliance on trees. Once more, the reliance on and availability of water resources for drinking and irrigation serves to highlight class disparities. Richer homes dig deep wells and tube wells and use groundwater for agriculture and drinking, whereas many impoverished households get their water directly from rivers and streams.

The main reasons why environmental degradation is having a bigger effect on class and gender are the increasing loss of natural resources, their taking by the government and private people, the loss of community-owned property, and other things. As a result of more people living in cities, farms using machines, and the breakdown of community resource management systems, local knowledge systems have been lost. This has made the effects of environmental damage on class and gender even worse (Agarwal 1992). Because of problems like the loss of forests, VCs, and drinking water, women have to spend more time and travel farther to get food, water, fuel, fodder, and other things they need. Women from lower castes depend more on women from higher castes to give them water because the wells they can use are drying up or getting dirty.

This immersed strain on women and girls has always resulted in a rise in suicides among them. (Shiva 1988; Bahuguna 1984). Villagers' access to forests and VCs has been hampered by the deterioration of forests, past and present wrongdoings, official regulations, and growing privatization. Women are now able to collect less goods from forests and VCs, which has a direct impact on their incomes. Since women are the primary cultivators in hill regions where male outmigration is high, the additional time spent on gathering has decreased the amount of time available for agricultural production (Agarwal 1992). Women's small income from selling firewood is also going down because of cutting down trees. This has a direct effect on the food that low-income families eat. Many poor families have had to switch to less healthy foods, eat half-cooked meals, or even cut back on the number of meals they eat every day because they can't get as much firewood or fruits, nuts, and other foods. Because of deeply rooted gender biases in the home, women and girls are treated worse when it comes to food and medical care. Poor country women work in rice fields, get water, wash clothes, and do other things that put them in contact with dirty water and diseases that are spread by water (Mencher-Sardamoni 1982). In addition, women are usually the ones who have to take care of sick family members.

4. Woman : the savior and nurturers of nature

"For more than forty centuries, Third World peasants, often mostly women, have innovated in agriculture," Indian ecofeminist Vandana Shiva notes. Different types of crops have been grown on different countries, and rotational and mixed cropping patterns have changed to meet the needs of the crops and the environment. For hundreds of years, peasants have kept the world fed by being experts in things like plant breeding, soil science, and water management (Shiva, 2004, p. 98). Markandaya talks about how third-country woman peasants feel about different kinds of farming and protecting the environment's long-term balance. In their book, Rukmani and her husband talk about how important it is for paddy farms to grow more than just rice. They even grow pumpkins. "Dung is too useful in our homes to be given to the land," says Rukmani, a woman peasant from the

third world who knows how to take care of the land the traditional way. "It is fuel for us and protection against damp, heat, and even ants and mice." Didn't you know? Page 34 of Markandaya (1954). For the Indian people, dung is one of the major sources of fuel, medicine, and food.

Pregnancy keeps her from working in the field, so she starts working in the garden. Her continual astonishment is aroused by the development of vegetables and plants. Working in the yard helps her grow mentally, emotionally, physically, and sexually, and it also makes her feel more connected to and at ease with the ground. This school of female spirituality is supported by US ecofeminist Starhawk, who says that "the second base idea of earth-centered spirituality is that of interconnection... (this) translates, natural cycles and processes, animals and plants" (Starhawak, Citation 1989, p. 178). Here, Rukmani helps connect things that are human and things that are not human. Nature's fury caused Rukmani's family to lose many crops and go hungry many nights. But she stays balanced and never curses either the field or nature because she loves her home country, as the next part of the book shows:

> *What more could a woman want? You have a roof over your head, a healthy supply of grain set aside for difficult times, and a lovely stirring in your body. The fields are green and wonderful to look at, and your spouse finds beauty in you that no one else has seen before. As I went about my work, waking up at daybreak and retiring to bed pleased, my feet felt light and my heart sang. We had peace and quiet. How vividly I remember it and how appreciative I am that the clamor that later encroached on our life was unable to stifle the memory or the need for it. Instead, it has made it stronger; I might not have realized how fortunate we were if it hadn't been for what has been. (Page 9 of Markandaya, 1954)*

The drought is very bad for Rukmani's family. Everything dies in the long weeds of drought, even the veggie, rice, and vine crops. After all the money has been used to pay the land dues, they are poor. "The hut and its people are behind us and yet in front of us, because we are sitting with our backs to the bullocks," Rukmani says as she goes in the bullock cart to the city after being left without land. She is showing her concern, love, and sympathy for the land. The cottage turns into a smudge on the horizon, and our cherished green fields disappear into a blur. The wheels continue to spew crimson dust, which we must still pierce with our eyes (Markandaya, 1954, p. 144).

Since "development has meant the ecological and cultural rupture of bonds with nature, and within society, it has meant the transformation of organic communities into groups of uprooted and alienated individuals searching for abstract identities," Vandana Shiva thinks that the scientific revolution and a reductionist

worldview, which she sees as bad development, are to blame for how women and nature are being used for profit (Shiva, 2010, p. 99).

Rukmani's concern for the bullock, which has numerous wounded spots on its skin with blood dripping down, further demonstrates her empathy for the natural world. Her heart is deeply scarred by it. However, the cart driver murmurs indifferently that he cannot afford another animal and that it would soon be useless. As the main argument of ecofeminism, these divergent emotional reactions make it abundantly evident that women care more about animals than men do, whereas males are generally less concerned about them. Rukmani's husband Nathan kills a snake after she unintentionally touches it, illustrating a similar point.

5. Conclusion

Thus, it is evident that ecofeminism is growing in India as well. To assert their place in a male-dominated nation, such as India, is a better indication of womanhood. Different perspectives will undoubtedly emerge as ecofeminism develops further, and other alliances and positions will either disappear or be replaced by more pressing ties. Different people may still have different ideas about how different religious and spiritual practices are linked to ecofeminism. There may be more to say between deep ecology and ecofeminism. Global ecofeminists will be affected by racism, population growth, and the idea that some people are better than others or that all people are better than animals. Another thing that needs to be talked about is the connection between ecofeminism and fighting for animal rights. There are strong links between taking advantage of women and treating animals badly in a male-centered and patriarchal way, especially in the meat-producing industries. There is another famous author, Mary Stange, who called herself an ecofeminist. In her books Woman the Hunter and Gun Women, she says that women are naturally predators of animals. According to Stange, ecofeminists' occasional connections between women and other animals may serve as justification for essentialism and, thus, for the continuous dominance of both women and other animals. She therefore contends that a reassessment of the relationship between women and animals is necessary.

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