



Rethinking Gender, Nature and Sustainability in the Era of Globalisation: An Ecofeminist Perspective

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Abstract: Eco-feminism has emerged as an important theoretical perspective that highlights the interconnection between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. In the era of globalisation, this relationship has become more complex as economic liberalisation, industrial expansion, and global market forces increasingly influence natural resources, livelihoods, and social structures. This paper examines the interface between eco-feminism and globalisation by rethinking the relationship between gender, nature, and sustainability, and analyses how globalisation creates both opportunities and challenges for women in relation to environmental resources and sustainable development. Globalisation has intensified the commodification of nature through large-scale industrialisation, resource extraction, and consumer-driven economic growth. These processes often disproportionately affect women, particularly in developing countries where women are primary users and managers of natural resources such as water, forests, and land. Eco-feminist scholars argue that patriarchal structures within global economic systems reinforce gender inequality as well as environmental degradation. Consequently, women frequently bear the burden of ecological crises such as climate change, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. At the same time, eco-feminism recognizes women's traditional knowledge, community-based practices, and environmental stewardship as vital elements of sustainable development. Women's participation in environmental movements, grassroots activism, and local governance contributes to more inclusive and sustainable resource management. The paper emphasizes the need for gender-sensitive policies and alternative development models that promote ecological balance, gender justice, and community participation to build a more sustainable and equitable future.

Key Words: Gender, Eco-feminism, ecological balance, gender justice, sustainability.

Introduction- The scope of scientific understanding and technical skills in the fields of ecology and environmental science has expanded significantly over the years. Increasing attention is being devoted to issues such as global environmental change, biodiversity conservation, environmental pollution, ecological restoration, and sustainable development, particularly with a focus on human welfare. Most contemporary environmental problems fall within the domain of ecological studies, and their resolution requires a comprehensive understanding of ecological principles. Such understanding is essential for formulating effective strategies for the sustainable use of natural resources and for mitigating environmental problems at local, regional, and global levels.

The term ecology was first coined by Ernst Haeckel in 1869 to denote the scientific

study of organisms in relation to their natural environment (Haeckel, 1869). Ecology examines the interaction of living organisms with their surroundings, which include both biotic components (other living organisms) and abiotic or physical components such as land, water, climate, and minerals. It essentially studies the relationships between species and their environment through the exchange of energy, materials, and information. Ecology therefore focuses on all factors that directly influence the development, behaviour, distribution, and survival of organisms in time and space. Although ecology initially emerged within the biological sciences, it gradually attracted the attention of social scientists as well. Geography was the first social science discipline to incorporate ecological analysis, followed by sociology and anthropology. In sociology, the ecological perspective gained



prominence through the work of the Chicago School of Sociology. Scholars such as Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess developed an ecological approach to understanding urban life and spatial organization of cities (Park & Burgess, 1925). Their work applied ecological concepts such as competition, adaptation, and dominance to explain the distribution and interaction of human groups in urban environments.

Environmental crises today affect societies across the world, particularly small-scale and indigenous communities such as tribal groups, hunters and gatherers, pastoralists, and subsistence agriculturalists who depend heavily on natural resources for their livelihoods. In such circumstances, the relationship between ecology and society becomes extremely significant. In the Indian sociological tradition, Radha Kamal Mukerjee developed an ecological approach to sociology. Mukerjee emphasized the interaction between human beings, culture, and nature and argued that rapid population growth increases pressure on natural resources, thereby intensifying environmental problems (Mukerjee, 1930). Anthropologists have also contributed significantly to ecological perspectives in the study of human societies. Scholars such as Julian Steward, Leslie White, Edmund Leach, Roy Rappaport, and Clifford Geertz examined the complex relationship between culture and environment. Steward developed the concept of the culture core, emphasizing economic and subsistence activities that shape cultural adaptation to the environment (Steward, 1955). Geertz discussed the concept of ecosystem as an integrated system of interaction among culture, biology, and environment (Geertz, 1963). Rappaport explored the interaction between human populations and ecosystems in his ecological study of ritual and subsistence patterns (Rappaport, 1968). Similarly, Leach examined environmental issues in his study of the Kachin people of Highland Burma and interpreted them within their socio-political context (Leach, 1954).

Environmental awareness in India has also grown significantly through grassroots

movements such as the Chipko Movement and the Narmada Bachao Andolan. These movements emphasized the protection of forests, water resources, and local livelihoods. At the global level, environmental concerns such as climate change, species extinction, desertification, and ozone depletion have been widely recognized. Reports by the World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF, 2014) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change highlight the increasing impact of human activities on climate change and ecosystems (IPCC, 2014).

Ecofeminism: Ecofeminism, also referred to as ecological feminism, is an interdisciplinary theoretical and political framework that explores the relationship between the domination of women and the exploitation of nature. According to Karen J. Warren, ecofeminism can be understood as an umbrella term describing the connections between the unjust domination of women, people of colour, indigenous communities, and the domination of nature (Warren, 2000). Ecofeminism therefore seeks to analyse how patriarchal systems of power create hierarchies that justify the exploitation of both women and the natural environment. Within patriarchal societies, masculinity is often associated with rationality, culture, and control, while women and nature are linked with emotion, reproduction, and passivity. This dualistic worldview has historically legitimised domination over both women and the environment.

The origins of ecofeminism as a concept are generally attributed to Françoise d'Eaubonne, who first used the term "ecofeminism" in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (Feminism or Death) published in 1974. D'Eaubonne argued that patriarchal domination over women and nature was responsible for environmental degradation and that feminist transformation was necessary for ecological survival (Roth-Johnson, 2013). Since then, ecofeminism has evolved as a diverse theoretical field combining insights from feminist theory, environmental ethics, and political ecology.

Ecofeminism also draws inspiration from environmental philosophies such as



deep ecology, which advocates small-scale communities and sustainable lifestyles based on local ecological knowledge. According to Freya Mathews, deep ecology emphasizes ecological harmony and the intrinsic value of nature (Mathews, 1992). However, critics argue that deep ecology often romanticizes local communities and overlooks social conflicts within them (Jackson, 1993). Ecofeminist scholars such as Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva advocate a shift away from capitalist development toward subsistence-based economies that emphasize ecological sustainability and community self-reliance (Mies & Shiva, 1990).

Criticism of ecofeminism has also emerged from the Gender and Development (GED) perspective. Scholars working within this framework argue that ecofeminism sometimes overemphasizes women's special relationship with nature and neglects the complex social structures that shape gender relations. According to Melissa Leach, gender relations are socially constructed and intersect with other factors such as class, race, and ethnicity in determining access to natural resources (Leach, 2007). Similarly, researchers such as Janet Buckingham-Hatfield emphasize that men also maintain important relationships with the environment and possess ecological knowledge (Buckingham-Hatfield, 2000).

In conclusion, ecofeminism provides a critical framework for understanding the interconnected nature of environmental and social injustices. By highlighting the links between the domination of women and the exploitation of nature, ecofeminism challenges the patriarchal and capitalist structures that underpin modern development models. It also emphasizes the importance of local knowledge, community participation, and gender equality in achieving sustainable development. As environmental crises intensify across the globe, ecofeminism offers valuable insights for creating more equitable and ecologically balanced societies.

Globalisation and Eco-feminism:

Globalisation refers to the increasing interconnectedness of economies, societies, cultures, and political systems across the

world through trade, communication, technology, and mobility of capital and labour. Since the late twentieth century, globalisation has transformed economic structures, production systems, and patterns of resource use. While globalisation has created opportunities for economic growth and technological advancement, it has also intensified environmental degradation and social inequalities. Ecofeminist scholars argue that the processes of globalisation often reproduce existing patriarchal and capitalist structures that exploit both women and nature.

Ecofeminism provides a critical framework to analyse how global economic systems affect gender relations and environmental sustainability. According to Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, modern capitalist globalisation is rooted in a system that commodifies nature and women's labour for profit (Mies & Shiva, 1993). In their influential work *Ecofeminism*, they argue that the dominant model of development promotes large-scale industrial production, intensive agriculture, and resource extraction, which lead to ecological destruction and marginalization of local communities. Women, particularly in rural and indigenous societies, are often the most affected because they depend directly on natural resources for subsistence and livelihoods.

The expansion of global markets has increased pressure on natural resources such as forests, water, and land. Multinational corporations and global trade policies often prioritize economic growth over ecological sustainability. Vandana Shiva argues that neoliberal economic policies encourage monoculture farming, genetic modification of seeds, and corporate control over agriculture, thereby undermining biodiversity and traditional knowledge systems (Shiva, 1993). According to Shiva, these processes also undermine women's roles in traditional agriculture, where they have historically served as custodians of seeds, biodiversity, and local ecological knowledge.

Ecofeminist scholars also highlight that globalisation has intensified the gendered division of labour. Women are frequently



employed in low-paid, labour-intensive sectors of global production such as garment manufacturing, electronics assembly, and agricultural plantations. These sectors often expose women workers to poor working conditions and environmental hazards. Ariel Salleh notes that the global economy relies heavily on women's unpaid or underpaid labour, which supports both capitalist production and ecological exploitation (Salleh, 1997). Women's domestic and caregiving responsibilities further limit their access to economic resources and decision-making processes.

Women's Participation in Environmental Movements: Women's participation in environmental movements, grassroots activism, and local governance has increasingly been recognized as a crucial factor in promoting inclusive and sustainable natural resource management. Across many societies—particularly in rural and indigenous communities—women play a central role in managing natural resources such as forests, water, land, and biodiversity. Their everyday interaction with the environment provides them with valuable ecological knowledge and practical experience that contributes to sustainable development. Scholars in feminist political ecology argue that women's involvement in environmental governance improves the effectiveness of conservation initiatives and enhances community participation. According to Bina Agarwal, women's participation in community-based forest management significantly improves conservation outcomes and leads to better monitoring and protection of forest resources (Agarwal, 2009).

Ecofeminist scholars argue that women's environmental activism is rooted in their lived experiences and close relationship with natural resources. According to Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, women's traditional roles in subsistence economies provide them with unique ecological knowledge and a strong commitment to protecting biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods. Their work emphasizes that community-based environmental management should recognize and incorporate women's knowledge and

leadership in order to achieve ecological sustainability. Women's participation in environmental movements, grassroots activism, and local governance plays a vital role in promoting inclusive and sustainable natural resource management. By contributing ecological knowledge, strengthening community institutions, and advocating for environmental justice, women act as key agents of sustainable development. Integrating gender perspectives into environmental governance and policy frameworks is therefore essential for achieving long-term ecological balance and social equity.

Changing Development Paradigms: The paradigm of development in India has undergone a significant transformation with the growing awareness of environmental degradation and the need for sustainability. Environmental issues have increasingly become a central concern in public discourse, academic research, and policy-making. Since the 1970s, India has experienced a notable rise in environmental consciousness driven by grassroots movements, government initiatives, and global environmental debates. The emergence of environmental movements such as the Chipko Movement and the Narmada Bachao Andolan played a critical role in shaping new perspectives on development, environmental conservation, and social justice. These movements challenged the dominant development model that prioritized economic growth over ecological balance and the well-being of local communities.

Environmental historian Ramachandra Guha (2000) argues that Chipko attracted widespread attention because it represented a broader form of social ecology. While initiatives such as Project Tiger focused primarily on wildlife conservation and B. B. Vohra's proposals emphasized state-managed land use, the Chipko movement raised important questions about social justice, equality, and community rights over natural resources. It highlighted the need to integrate ecological sustainability with the livelihoods and rights of local communities. According to Guha (1988),



environmental conflicts and debates that emerged during the 1970s and 1980s became both the private and public expressions of the environmental movement in India. The growing environmental consciousness during this period was further strengthened by research institutions and citizen initiatives. One of the most influential contributions was the publication of the State of India's Environment report by the Centre for Science and Environment in 1982. This citizen's report provided a detailed account of environmental degradation in the country and highlighted issues such as deforestation, water pollution, and loss of biodiversity. The report also encouraged universities and research institutions to develop environmental studies programs. Similar reports published later became influential models for environmental monitoring and public participation in other countries.

India is also recognized as one of the world's most biologically diverse countries. The country hosts thousands of plant and animal species and includes four major biodiversity hotspots: the Himalayas, Indo-Burma, Western Ghats, and Sundaland. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List (2008), many species in India face the risk of extinction due to habitat loss and environmental degradation. The Government of India has established numerous protected areas, including national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and biosphere reserves, to conserve biodiversity. Climate change has emerged as another major challenge for sustainable development. Increasing greenhouse gas emissions from industrialization and fossil fuel consumption have contributed to global warming and environmental instability. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has played a crucial role in raising global awareness about climate change. Under the leadership of Indian environmentalist R. K. Pachauri, the organization's efforts were recognized with the Nobel Peace Prize for contributions to climate change research and awareness. The evolution of environmental awareness in India reflects a shift from

traditional development models toward more sustainable and inclusive approaches. Environmental movements, research institutions, and policy initiatives have played important roles in shaping this transformation. However, challenges such as rapid urbanization, biodiversity loss, and climate change continue to threaten ecological sustainability. Addressing these challenges requires integrated strategies that combine environmental conservation, social justice, and sustainable economic development.

Conclusion- The discussion on ecofeminism and globalization highlights the deep interconnections between gender, nature, and sustainable development. Ecofeminist perspectives emphasize that the domination of nature and the marginalization of women are rooted in similar structures of power, particularly patriarchal and capitalist systems that prioritize economic growth over ecological balance and social justice. In the context of globalization, these dynamics have intensified, as large-scale industrialization, commercialization of natural resources, and global market forces increasingly affect local ecosystems and the livelihoods of vulnerable communities, especially women.

Reconceptualizing development through an ecofeminist lens therefore requires integrating gender perspectives into environmental governance, strengthening women's participation in decision-making processes, and recognizing traditional ecological knowledge systems. Policies that promote community-based resource management, sustainable livelihoods, and gender equality can help build resilient societies that balance economic development with ecological sustainability. In conclusion, ecofeminism provides an important framework for rethinking the relationship between globalization, gender, and the environment. By highlighting the interconnectedness of social and ecological systems, ecofeminism encourages a more inclusive and sustainable model of development. Such an approach recognizes that protecting the environment and empowering women are mutually reinforcing



goals essential for achieving long-term sustainability and ecological justice.

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