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Research Article

Eco-Feminism: A Critical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Eco-feminism is an important intellectual and socio-cultural discourse that establishes a deep relationship between women and nature. Both women and the environment have historically been subjected to domination, exploitation, and marginalization under patriarchal social systems. This article critically examines the philosophical foundation of eco-feminism, its relation to environmental consciousness, and the socio-cultural structures responsible for the oppression of women and nature. Drawing upon Indian philosophical traditions, environmental ethics, and global eco-feminist thought, the article highlights the necessity of protecting both women and the environment for sustaining social harmony and ecological balance.

INTRODUCTION

Nature is the supreme creator, and woman represents one of its most profound manifestations. Since the origin of civilization, both nature and women have remained intrinsically connected with the processes of creation, nurture, and continuity of life. The environmental sphere and women's existence share a subtle yet inseparable bond. Therefore, any attempt to understand the environmental crisis without considering the condition of women remains incomplete.

Human civilization has evolved through continuous interaction with nature. However, the

rise of materialism, industrialization, and patriarchal dominance has gradually transformed this relationship into one of exploitation. Modern society often treats both women and nature as objects to be controlled and consumed. This tendency has led to ecological destruction and gender inequality simultaneously.

Eco-feminism emerged as a response to this dual oppression. It argues that the same patriarchal ideology responsible for the exploitation of women is also responsible for the destruction of nature. Thus, the liberation of women and the protection of the environment are interconnected struggles.

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Women and Nature: A Shared Identity

In literature, philosophy, and culture, women and nature are often viewed as complementary forces. Both symbolize fertility, creativity, compassion, endurance, and nourishment. The relationship between woman and nature is not merely symbolic; it is experiential and existential.

Indian philosophical traditions also emphasize this interconnectedness. Ancient scriptures frequently compare woman with the earth, portraying both as life-giving and sustaining entities. In the *Manusmriti*, the metaphor of seed and soil illustrates the creative relationship between man and woman. Similarly, nature is understood as the universal mother that nurtures all forms of existence.

Women and nature share common experiences of suffering under patriarchal systems. Both are deprived of autonomy and are subjected to exploitation in the name of progress and development. Eco-feminism identifies this shared oppression and seeks to restore dignity and balance.

Emergence of Eco-Feminism

The concept of eco-feminism gained prominence in the 1970s. French feminist thinker Françoise d'Eaubonne first used the term "Eco-feminism" in 1974. The movement emerged from the realization that environmental destruction and women's oppression stem from similar structures of power and domination.

Eco-feminism challenges patriarchal ideology, which promotes hierarchy, control, and exploitation. According to eco-feminists, modern industrial civilization has encouraged a worldview that values profit and power over compassion and sustainability.

Patriarchy and Environmental Exploitation

Patriarchal society has historically viewed both women and nature as subordinate entities. Men are associated with culture, power, and rationality, whereas women and nature are associated with emotion, passivity, and dependence. This binary thinking legitimizes exploitation.

Industrialization, urbanization, and consumerism have intensified environmental degradation. Forest destruction, pollution, ecological imbalance, and climate crises are direct consequences of human greed and exploitative development models. Similarly, women continue to face discrimination, violence, marginalization, and social inequality.

Eco-feminists argue that environmental crises cannot be resolved without addressing gender injustice. The exploitation of nature and the oppression of women are deeply interconnected social realities.

Deep Ecology and Environmental Ethics

The philosophy of "Deep Ecology," introduced by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in 1973, significantly influenced eco-feminist thought. Deep Ecology advocates a holistic view of nature and emphasizes the intrinsic value of all living beings.

Arne Naess proposed several important principles:

1. Prioritizing the health of nature
2. Protecting ecological integrity
3. Developing ecological wisdom
4. Viewing humans as equal to other species
5. Recognizing the inherent value of nature



Eco-Feminism and Social Justice

Eco-feminism extends beyond environmental concerns and addresses broader social injustices such as sexism, racism, class exploitation, and caste oppression. It believes that all forms of domination are interconnected.

The movement seeks to create a society based on equality, coexistence, compassion, and sustainability. It opposes violence, domination, and consumerist culture.

Global Eco-Feminist Movements

Several global movements reflect eco-feminist ideals. Wangari Maathai's "Green Belt Movement" in Kenya empowered rural women through environmental conservation and afforestation. Similarly, India's famous "Chipko Movement" became a symbol of environmental resistance led largely by rural women.

Eco-Feminism in Indian Tradition

Indian cultural traditions have long recognized the sacredness of nature. Rivers, forests, mountains, and the earth itself are worshipped as maternal forces. The Atharva Veda proclaims: "Earth is my mother, and I am her child."

Indian philosophical traditions emphasize harmony between humanity and nature. Concepts such as Mother Earth and Mother River reflect ecological reverence embedded within Indian culture.

CONCLUSION

Eco-feminism is not merely a theoretical framework but a transformative social philosophy. It exposes the interconnected exploitation of

women and nature under patriarchal systems and advocates a more humane and ecological worldview.

The future of humanity depends upon restoring balance between human civilization and nature. Environmental protection cannot succeed without ensuring dignity, equality, and justice for women. Likewise, women's liberation remains incomplete without ecological harmony.

Eco-feminism therefore calls for a compassionate, sustainable, and equitable society where both women and nature are respected as life-giving forces.

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