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ECOFEMINISM: INDIAN AND WESTERN PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the philosophical intersection of Ecofeminism and Sanskrit literature by offering a comparative analysis of Indian and Western ecofeminist perspectives. It examines how ancient Indian texts and traditions approach contemporary ecofeminist thought, highlighting the continuities and divergences between Indian and Western traditions. The study exposes that in ancient India, both women and nature were revered as primordial forces, a view reflected in Sanskrit literature where they were venerated for their life-sustaining qualities. It critiques the shift from intrinsic to instrumental valuation of women and nature over time. Indian ecofeminism, drawing from indigenous spiritual practices and ancient texts, advocates for a comprehensive view of the interrelatedness of human, nature, and the divine. In contrast, Western ecofeminism is often rooted in Enlightenment thought, focusing on deconstructing dualisms, critiquing capitalist, and patriarchal systems. The research also addresses how traditional Indian values, cultural practices, and spiritual dimensions offer a unique framework for addressing ecological and feminist concerns. By revisiting and integrating these traditional insights, the paper argues that Indian ecofeminism provides valuable guidance for creating sustainable and equitable futures to the problem of modern ecological exploitation and social crises arising from the oppression of women and nature. To this issue, ecofeminism emphasizes that both women and nature must be respected and treated fairly with due dignity by valuing their contribution in the survival possible for humans on the planet - earth.

KEYWORDS: Ecofeminism, Indian ecofeminism, Culture, Environment, Interconnections.

INTRODUCTION

Ecofeminism is a concept follows interconnection between assorted movements and struggles by embracing environmental and feminist studies and remain united in its approach ensuing fundamental order of women, and environment. The intersection of these orders is established by recognizing the link of domination, exploitation, and oppression affecting both the orders. Ecofeminism a confluence of feminism and environmentalism seeking way to dilute supremacy of the systems (1). It has been emphasized by addressing the related issues of gender equality, dignity, respect, and environmental degradation through diverse literature, debate, and discussions.

The ecofeminism is contextualized in two ways:

1. Theoretical approach; the first use of the word “ecoféminisme” by d’Eaubonne in her 1974 book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort*. Authors and their works such as Mary Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology* (1978), Elizabeth Dodson Gray’s *Green Paradise Lost* (1979), and Carolyn Merchant’s *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (1980) (Gaard and Gruen 2005; Tong 2014; Moore 2016) etc can be considered influential in the emergence and consolidation of ecofeminism (2).

2. Practical Understanding; the foundation of ecofeminism pragmatically related with women’s driven activism to save the environment and sustains conditions of life on

planet earth with anti-war and anti-nuclear movement. It traced during 1960s in the USA and Europe. In India the Chipko Movement-1970 being a significant example in this case, aimed to protect trees and the forest from government backed logging by hugging and embracing trees impeded loggers.

Ecofeminism is an interdisciplinary movement that combines ecological and feminist struggle to introduce the interconnection between environmental exploitation and gender discrimination. Similar to the other academic frameworks, mainly in the feminist movement, ecofeminism has evolved and raising since it was first coined half a century ago. Rooted in the recognition that patriarchal structures often mirror exploitative relationships with nature, ecofeminism critiques the systematic supremacy over both women and the environment. Over time, it has widened to incorporate perspectives from diverse cultures, including Indigenous and Eastern philosophies, which emphasize harmony with nature. By integrating ecological ethics with feminist discourse, ecofeminism fosters a holistic approach to sustainability and social justice, advocating for policy changes, grassroots activism, and ethical environmental stewardship to challenge existing hierarchies.

In the Indian perspectives, ecofeminism upholds a unique dimension by integrating traditional philosophies and contemporary issues related with environment and gender. Both women and nature were revered as primordial forces in ancient India, a perspective deeply embedded in the ancient Sanskrit literature. Women were worshiped as goddesses, embodying divine power and nurturing qualities, while trees were venerated for their protective and medicinal properties. Plants served as crucial

sources of medicine, curing diseases, and sustaining health. Rivers were revered as vital sources of livelihood, trade, and commerce, and mountains, like the Himalayas, were seen as guardians of the Indian subcontinent. This profound respect highlighted the inherent value of women and nature as life forces. However, over time, these perceptions shifted, and the inherent value of women and nature was increasingly reduced to mere instrumental value. This paper explores the concept and issues of ecofeminism through an Indian lens, focusing on the cultural, spiritual, and social aspects that shape this perspective. By examining dualisms, the interconnection of oppressions, the valuation of care and nurturing, critiques of capitalism, cultural and spiritual dimensions, and activism, it will showcase how Indian ecofeminism offers a holistic approach to address both environmental and social challenges.

METHOD

The methodology of the research article is analytical and descriptive in nature. It describes to emphasize the related issues and analyze the concepts, ideals, standards, and principles of ecofeminism. It includes identification, collection of textual material i.e., primary and secondary resources in the field of philosophy and Sanskrit literature to Scrutinize philosophical ideas and Sanskrit verses in Sanskrit literature to justify the problem of the title. With quality of content critical approach on various issues of ecofeminism will be adopted to attain objectives of the research. The critical understanding of the arguments will help in deriving the outcomes of the research. The study is transliterated and illustrative in nature wherever is feasible in explanation.

DISCUSSION

Indian ecofeminism as opposed to the western idea of it

"An early impetus for the ecofeminist movement was the realization that the liberation of the aim of all branches of feminism -- cannot be fully effected without the liberation of nature; and conversely, the liberation of nature so ardently desired by environmentalists will not be fully effected without the liberation of women: conceptual, symbolic, empirical, and historical linkages between women and nature as they are constructed in Western culture require feminists and environmentalists to address these liberatory efforts together if we are to be successful", writes Warren in 1991(3). While ecofeminism as a movement shares common themes across different cultural contexts, Indian ecofeminism often contrasts with Western ecofeminism in its foundational philosophies and emphases. In the Indian context, ecofeminism frequently draws from indigenous traditions, spiritual practices, and ancient texts, including Sanskrit literature. It often emphasizes a holistic view of the universe, where humans, nature, and spiritual elements are interconnected. This perspective is deeply rooted in cultural traditions that valorize the Earth as a nurturing entity, akin to a mother. Indian ecofeminists advocate for a return to these traditional values, emphasizing harmony with nature and sustainable living (4). This approach can be seen as a resistance to the colonial and capitalist practices that have historically exploited both nature and women. For example, the veneration of the Earth as *Bhoomi Devi* (Earth Goddess) reflects a deep-seated respect and recognition of nature's

nurturing role in Indian spiritual and cultural practices (5). However, in Indian perspectives the Chipko movement in Garwal region of mighty Himalayas 1970 led by women to protect trees and deforestation as first venture of ecofeminist movement at Indian subcontinent exposes the sensitivity of women towards nature or in sustaining environment. Later the prominent ecofeminist Vandana Shiva led the movement by criticizing the development plans and its impact on environment by connecting modern science and technology for being western oriented due to which patriarchal and colonial patterns promoted the consequential harm to women and nature. Vandana Shiva philosophies this understanding by following the *Sāṅkhya* School thought that believes in the dualistic realities *Prakriti* and *Pūruṣa* (6). *Prakriti* is the universal cause of the world existence, which is metaphorically underlies women as *Shakti*. So, *Prakriti* is *Shakti* a feminine principle and creator of the cosmos comes in contact with eternal *Purusha* produces the world. hence, *Prakriti* is the creating power of *Pūruṣa*. So, *Prakriti* is *Shakti* and *Shakti* representing women. Therefore, women as *Shakti* are *Prakriti*, this analogy denotes the connection of women, nature, and development. It is also depicting the relation of nurturer and nurture. With this another prolific ecofeminist Bina Aggarwal showcasing the intersection between, women, environment, and development in context with south Asia.

In Bina viewpoint “In the patriarchal thoughts, women are identified as being closer to nature and men as being closer to culture. Nature is seen as inferior to culture; hence women are seen inferior to men.”

As nature is the creative form of feminine principle. So existentially, there is no divide between man and nature, or man and woman because all forms of life arise from the feminine principle (7).

Philosophically, Vandana compares modern western viewpoint of nature with Indian cosmology. The modern western views of nature recognizing duality and dichotomy between man and nature, while Indian cosmology identifies duality in unity between person and nature (*Pūruṣa-Prakṛiti*). Both man and nature are inalienable and corresponding to one another in nature. All forms of creation follow this dialectical unifying principle in the unity with diversity. The dialectical harmony between genders (male and female) and between nature and man generated the basis of ecological thought. In this context, there is no separation between human and nature, as nature, referred to as *Prakṛiti*, is essential for sustaining life. Therefore, nature is regarded as a unified and sacred entity in relation to *Prakṛiti*. The embodiment and manifestation of the feminine principle is characterized by Creativity and productivity with diversity in form emphasizing connectedness and inter-relationship of all beings for maintaining continuity between the human and nature to develop Sanctity of life in nature (8).

However, the philosophy of dichotomy between man and nature generates an ontological domination over nature and men exploiting women as objects of study and treating nature as a matter of knowing. This leads to a form of epistemic violence that occurs in form of disruption in the ecological

perceptions of nature in its interpretation as an object. To repudiate Indian ecofeminism Biel's counter expression for it as, "(They)...freeze women as merely caring and nurturing beings instead of expanding the full range of women's human potentialities and abilities" (9). Further he emphasizing about women as nurturing as, "The use of metaphors of women as 'nurturing' – like the earth, and of the earth as female abound are regressive rather than liberating women" (10). He considered that Indian ecofeminism reinforce stereotypes only. Even as criticism to Indian ecofeminism Bina Aggarwal reiterates the fact as, "what these arguments seem to overlook is that concepts of nature, culture and gender are "historically and socially constructed and vary across and within cultures and time periods" (11). This essentialism presents women as a homogeneous category, both within countries and across nations. It "fails to differentiate among women by class, race, ethnicity and so on" (12).

In contrast, Western ecofeminism has been more explicitly influenced by Enlightenment thought and feminist theory, focusing on the critique of patriarchal and capitalist systems. Western prominent ecofeminists Susan Griffin, Mary Daly, Carolyn Merchant, Ynestra Young, Ariel Kay Salleh, Karen Warren, etc. corroborated the interconnected oppression of nature and women. With this they often emphasize the need to deconstruct the dualisms that separate culture from nature, male from female, and reason from emotion. In this struggle Carolyn Merchant in 1992, analysed an array of perspectives, which includes liberal, radical, and socialist attitudes by criticizing patriarchal system that paves the path in advancing the status of women and nature.

To this Ynestra Young initially in 1976 emphasized the concept and in 1980 ecofeminism was recognised as the independent area of research leading to the first conference on it titled as, 'Women and Life on Earth: Ecofeminism in the 80s,' focussing on the impact and connection between feminism, military threats, environment, and physical and mental well-being. Thereafter, Ynestra called for a peaceful protest to Pentagon demanding equal rights for women in social, economic, and reproductive rights with the end of militaristic actions and exploitation of people and environment by government. Hence this women movement called it as Pentagon action (13). At the other side Maria Mies attacked on the approach and attitude of modern science by analysing dominance of patriarchal instrumentalism and stream of science not objective in accepting scientific knowledge and its usage. The socialist feminist Ariel Salleh considers that the supposed intrinsic connection of women and nature is an socially constructed beliefs predominantly this kind of anxiety over essentialism seen in post-modern academics, Europe, and in southern hemisphere where the interlace of caste, class, gender, race, and speciesism domination and exploitation is construed from social-economic relations (14). Similarly, Van Plum wood an Australian ecofeminist from 70's through 20th century developed radical ecosophy in her book 'Feminism and the mastery of nature' discussing the nature of ecofeminist ideology in depicting relation of man with nature (15). She innovatively use the word, 'Ecosophy' that is the philosophy of ecological harmony and maintain equilibrium between man and nature. At the other end, Warren simulates the ecofeminism in terms of feminism and environmentalism in curbing the male

domination with all kinds of 'isms' to overcome the gender issues or androcentric (male centred) practices (16).

The movement in the West tends to have a stronger focus on activism against industrialization and environmental degradation, highlighting issues like climate change, pollution, and animal rights. With this there is a spiritual dimension in Western ecofeminism, it is generally less pronounced and not as deeply integrated into the cultural framework as in the Indian context. Within ecofeminism, this phenomenon can manifest in the imposition of Western environmental ideologies onto Indigenous and Global South communities without regard for their traditional ecological knowledge. These dynamic risks reinforcing colonial patterns of domination, where privileged actors claim to "save" oppressed groups rather than supporting their agency and leadership. Acknowledging and addressing this issue is crucial to ensuring that ecofeminism remains a truly inclusive and decolonial movement.

Another significant difference lies in the relationship between modernity and technology. Indian ecofeminism often critiques the Western model of development, advocating for alternative paradigms that are more in harmony with traditional ecological knowledge (17). On the other hand, Western ecofeminism may include more diverse perspectives on the role of technology and modernity, with some strands advocating for technological innovation as a means of achieving sustainability, while others critique its role in perpetuating environmental and social injustices. The extreme white savior mentality is not exclusive to ecofeminism; rather, in any intersectional context, it can hinder the self-advocacy efforts of marginalized communities.

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Dualisms and hierarchies

In many cultures, men and women are perceived not only as different but as opposites. This binary view, often referred to as "opposite genders," is a social construct rather than an inherent truth. Gender, in reality, exists on a spectrum. The problem is not that women inherently have a closer relationship with nature than men but that this relationship has been historically undervalued and marginalized. The logic of dominance functions on the "power-over" concept of power, which leads to the otherization of nature as opposed to man. Patriarchal systems maintain the idea that men are entitled to dominate women and nature, leading to practices that harm both. This includes environmental degradation and the marginalization and oppression of women. This perspective overlooks the interconnectedness of all beings and the environment, perpetuating a hierarchical relationship where humans, particularly men, are positioned above nature. Such a worldview enables the exploitation of natural resources without accountability, reinforcing structures of power that prioritize control over coexistence. In contrast, many Indigenous and non-Western traditions

emphasize relationality, recognizing the earth as a living entity rather than a passive resource. Ecofeminism challenges these imposed binaries, advocating for a reimagining of power that is based on collaboration, care, and ecological stewardship rather than domination.

Indian ecofeminism critiques these dualisms and emphasizes a more integrated understanding of all life forms. The concept of *Ardhanarishvara*, a deity combining *Shiva* and *Parvati*, symbolizes the unity and equality of masculine and feminine energies (18). This portrayal challenges the hierarchical separation of genders and emphasizes a more integrated understanding of all life forms, reflecting an ethos of respect and balance.

In the Vedic period, texts like the *Rigveda* often depicted nature as a nurturing force, with hymns dedicated to Prithvi (*Atharveda*. 12.63) and *Saraswati* (river goddess), reflecting reverence for the feminine aspects of nature (19). The Upanishads, with their philosophical discourses, further advanced the idea of a unified reality, transcending dualisms. Manu in (9.28 – *Manusmriti*) shloka says that the work of *Panchmahāyajñā* belongs to women which also include '*balivaishva -dev -yagya*' which means -- *Bali*: sacrifice or gift *Vishvadev*: everyone and everything in the entire universe.

This ritual includes giving water to animals and plants, feeding ants and it is said to sacrifice a little part of the food before eating to the welfare of plant, animals and nature. And this holy work is in the women's hand!

The *Dharmshāstras*, regardless of their controversial standing in today's socio-political setting, have laid down a rather unified understanding of women and nature. For instance, Manusmriti superimposes the birth-giving power of women with that of the *bhumi* or the land which a man, or a *bija* (seed) as he is labeled in the text, wouldn't be able to do alone (9.33, *Manusmriti*).

Thus, establishing a fundamental relationship between the binaries of gender. The epic *Mahābhārata* illustrates the concept of *Shakti* (divine feminine power) through characters like *Draupadi*, who symbolizes resilience and moral strength.

Thus, in Indian thought, as reflected in ancient texts and practices, the relationship between humans and nature is not seen as oppositional. Instead, it is understood as contemporaneous and interdependent, emphasizing a holistic and harmonious coexistence.

Interconnection of oppressions

Ecofeminism posits that the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women are interconnected. Patriarchal systems that dominate women also tend to exploit natural resources. This perspective is grounded in the recognition that both women and nature are often subjected to similar forms of domination and control. Moreover, Indian ecofeminism highlights the interconnected nature of various forms of oppression, such as casteism, sexism, and environmental degradation. In India, lower caste and indigenous communities often suffer the brunt of environmental harm due to pollution, deforestation, and displacement caused by industrial projects. This

interconnectedness echoes the traditional Indian worldview, where the well-being of the environment, society, and economy are seen as interdependent.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* offers an example through the character of Sita, who is closely associated with nature and the earth, embodying purity and fertility. Sita's exile to the forest and her connection to the land reflect the socio-ecological dynamics and the marginalization of both women and nature. Her return to the earth, as described in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, signifies the intrinsic bond between femininity and ecological cycles, aligning with ecofeminist thought that sees women's oppression as intertwined with environmental degradation (20).

The *Mahābhārata* also contains ecofeminist undertones, particularly in the *Yakṣa Prashna* (*Vana Parva*, 313), where *Yudhiṣṭhira* acknowledges the reciprocal relationship between humans and the environment: *Pr̥thivī dhārayatyenaṁ, prāṇino dhārayanti ca*—"The earth sustains all beings, and they, in turn, sustain the earth" (21).

The *Devī Māhātmya* (7.32-34), part of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, reinforces the power of the divine feminine, stating that the *Devī* manifests as *Prakṛti*, sustaining creation while also possessing the ability to withdraw her energy when disrespected. This highlights an early recognition of ecological balance being tied to the reverence of the feminine. The *Manusmṛiti* (3.56) also warns against the mistreatment of women, equating their suffering to societal decay. This aligns with ecofeminist principles, suggesting that the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature disrupt cosmic harmony. Additionally, the *Arthaśāstra* (2.24) by *Kauṭilya* stresses environmental

conservation, emphasizing the importance of sustainable forestry and water management, which further connects governance with ecological ethics (22).

Valuation of care and nurturing

Traditional Indian values often emphasize qualities such as care, empathy, and nurturing, which are typically associated with femininity. These values are reflected in the cultural reverence for the Earth as *Bhoomi Devi* (Earth Goddess), who is seen as a nurturing mother providing for all beings. Deeply embedded in philosophical and religious traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, which stress non-violence (*ahimsā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and selfless service (*seva*) as fundamental ethical principles (23). The *Manusmriti* deems household nourishment the sole duty of women (9.11, *Manusmriti*) while comparing her need to adapt to the husband's standing with that of a river changing its course according to the terrain (9.22, *Manusmriti*). These cultural representations reinforce the perception that women hold a unique, albeit socially constructed, relationship with the environment. However, this connection has also been used to justify restrictive gender roles, limiting women's participation in decision-making processes while romanticizing their relationship with nature (24). Ecofeminist scholars argue that while these values promote harmony and sustainability, they must be examined critically to ensure that they do not reinforce structural inequalities but instead empower women as active agents in ecological and social transformation.

Classical Sanskrit poetry, including works by *Kalidasa*, also captures this nurturing valuation. *Kālidāsa* mentions how the plants and animals of the ashram will miss

Shakuntalā when she is gone to her in-laws'. Thought philosophically, this symbolizes how a woman and nature are inseparable. A woman becomes one with her surroundings. While personifying nature, *Kālidāsa* writes how the peacocks have stopped dancing and deer have stopped eating, after knowing that *Shakuntalā* is leaving. This symbolizes that nature reciprocates the love received from human beings in its ways.

Much like *Shakuntalam's* character, the *Kumārasambhava* portrays nature's love and nurturing aspects through *Pārvatī's* deep connection with the natural world, yet this depiction warrants a critical examination. *Kālidāsa* romanticizes *Pārvatī's* asceticism, emphasizing her affinity for plants and animals to the extent that she is said to love them more than her firstborn. While this reinforces the association between femininity and nature, it also risks essentializing women as inherently self-sacrificing and bound to nature in ways that men are not. The reverence for natural elements as deities—trees, rivers, and mountains personified as divine—reflects an ecological consciousness. However, the very structures that deify nature and femininity have historically been used to limit women's agency, framing them within roles of passive nurturance rather than active participation in shaping ecological and social discourse. Thus, while such literary traditions highlight an interwoven relationship between the feminine and the environment, they must also be interrogated for their potential to reinforce restrictive gender norms.

Critique of capitalism

The rapid industrialization and adoption of capitalist economic models in India have often led to environmental degradation and social inequities. Indian ecofeminists critique these developments, arguing that they prioritize economic growth over ecological and social well-being. Large-scale projects like dams and mining have displaced indigenous communities and destroyed ecosystems (25). Furthermore, ecofeminist scholars challenge the "development paradigm" that equates progress with industrialization, arguing instead for alternative models based on traditional ecological knowledge, community-led conservation, and gender-equitable environmental governance (26). Movements like the Chipko Movement and the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* embody these principles, as women have been at the forefront of resisting environmental destruction, advocating for policies that prioritize ecological integrity over short-term economic gains. Capitalist economies, profit and growth, often exploit natural resources unsustainably. This exploitation is justified by viewing nature as an endless supply of raw materials to be used for economic development. Similarly, women's labour, both paid and unpaid, is often undervalued and exploited. Women frequently take on the majority of unpaid domestic work, which is essential for the functioning of the economy but remains invisible and unrecognized. Globalization continues to prolong inequalities, with multinational corporations exploiting both natural resources and labor, particularly in developing countries like India where women often work in poor conditions for low wages.

The push for ecofeminist economics suggests a transition from extractive capitalism to localized, sustainable economies that center community well-being and ecological resilience.

The critique can be contextualized through the *Mahābhārata's* concept of *Dharma* (righteous duty), which underscores the balance between material pursuits and ethical living. *Dharma*, as outlined in the *Śāntiparva* (Chapters 58–60), is not merely a personal moral code but an obligation that extends to governance and ecological stewardship. The epic consistently contrasts the consequences of greed, over-extraction of resources, and disregard for environmental balance with the ideals of sustainable living and responsible governance. The *Arthashastra*, an ancient treatise on statecraft, also emphasizes the importance of environmental conservation as a duty of the ruler, underscoring the long-standing awareness of sustainable governance in Indian thought (27).

Ecofeminist scholars argue that these classical frameworks offer an indigenous critique of modern extractivist capitalism, which prioritizes economic growth at the expense of ecological and social well-being. The contrast between *Artha* (material prosperity) and *Dharma* (righteous duty) in Sanskrit literature aligns with contemporary ecofeminist thought, which calls for a balance between economic development and ecological justice (28). Thus, traditional Indian knowledge systems not only recognize environmental ethics but also caution against unsustainable exploitation, reinforcing the call for a more holistic and equitable approach to ecological governance.

Women and disasters

Disasters, whether natural or anthropogenic, are not gender-neutral phenomena. They exacerbate pre-existing social inequalities, including those based on gender. Because of their socioeconomic vulnerabilities, restricted access to resources, and ingrained gender norms, women—especially those in marginalized communities—frequently suffer the most during such crises. The perspective of ecofeminism provides a critical lens through which this disproportionate impact can be understood, as it links the exploitation of nature with the subjugation of women under patriarchal systems.

Women frequently depend heavily on natural resources for their survival and means of subsistence, especially in rural and indigenous communities. They are the primary gatherers of water, firewood, and food, responsibilities that become exponentially more challenging when disasters disrupt ecosystems. For example, during droughts, women may need to walk longer distances to fetch water, increasing their physical burden and exposure to risks, including violence. Similarly, after floods, women often face greater challenges in securing food for their families, as agricultural systems, typically reliant on women's labour, are destroyed.

Disasters also exacerbate women's socio-economic vulnerabilities. Ecofeminism highlights how women's marginalized status, shaped by patriarchal economic systems, renders them less resilient to disasters. Decision-making, financial resources, and land ownership are frequently inaccessible to women. This lack of agency means they are frequently excluded from disaster preparedness planning and recovery efforts. For instance, in many parts of the world, women's access to early

warning systems is hindered by their lower literacy rates or societal norms that restrict their mobility. During recovery, women are often left out of rebuilding initiatives, leading to long-term economic instability and deepening gender inequalities.

The ecofeminist critique also underscores how cultural and gendered expectations amplify the burdens on women during and after disasters. Women are typically seen as caregivers, a role that intensifies during crises. They are expected to prioritize the well-being of their families over their own safety and needs. In displacement camps or shelters, Women frequently face an increased danger of violence based on their gender, which encompasses sexual exploitation and harassment. The breakdown of social structures during disasters removes protective mechanisms, leaving women particularly vulnerable. Ecofeminism argues that this vulnerability is not incidental but a consequence of systems that devalue women's safety and autonomy.

Climate change, a global-scale disaster, provides a critical context for examining the ecofeminist perspective. Women are disproportionately affected by the effects of climate change, including elevated sea levels, severe weather incidents, and decrease in biodiversity. Smallholder women farmers, for instance, are among the most affected by climate variability because they depend heavily on natural resources for their livelihoods. Yet, they often have limited access to adaptive technologies, education, and policy frameworks that could mitigate these impacts. Ecofeminism highlights the irony that women, despite being the most affected, are frequently the least responsible for environmental degradation and climate change.

Ecofeminism also emphasizes the potential for women to act as agents of change in disaster management and environmental stewardship. Women possess unique knowledge and skills related to resource management, which can be invaluable in crafting sustainable and equitable disaster response strategies. By integrating women into decision-making processes and leveraging their expertise, societies can create more resilient systems that benefit everyone. Ecofeminist scholars and activists argue that dismantling patriarchal systems and fostering gender equality are essential for both environmental sustainability and social justice.

However, the disproportionate impact of disasters on women is deeply intertwined with the principles of ecofeminism, which links the exploitation of nature with the subjugation of women. Disasters reveal the vulnerabilities created by patriarchal systems and underscore the urgent need for gender-sensitive approaches to disaster management. By embracing the ecofeminist framework, societies can better understand and address the structural inequities that magnify women's suffering during crises. This holistic perspective not only advocates for women's rights but also champions environmental justice, illustrating that the emancipation of women and the safeguarding of the environment are fundamentally linked. Environmental preservation and women's emancipation are intrinsically linked.

Cultural and spiritual dimensions

A key spiritual aspect of ecofeminism is the holistic worldview that sees all life forms as interconnected and interdependent. This perspective encourages a sense of unity

and responsibility towards all beings, fostering a more inclusive and compassionate approach to environmental and social issues.

Indian ecofeminism draws on the rich cultural and spiritual traditions of the country, which have long revered nature. The *Vedas* and *Upanishads* speak of the divine presence in all aspects of nature, promoting an ethos of respect and reverence. For instance, the Rigveda asserts the interconnectedness of all beings, stating, 'Truth is one, but the wise speak of it in many ways'. This verse underscores the non-dualistic perspective that pervades Indian ecofeminism, challenging hierarchical distinctions between humans and nature, male and female, and the material and spiritual worlds. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (7.26.2) emphasizes that the self (*Ātman*) and the cosmos (*Brahman*) are interconnected, fostering an environmental ethic based on mutual respect rather than domination. Ancient Indian literature often reflects this spiritual dimension, portraying nature as a living entity with intrinsic value. *Kalidāsa's* works, such as *Shakuntalā* and *Meghaduta*, offer profound insights into the spiritual and emotional connections between humans and nature. His poetry illustrates the integration of nature into human experience and underscores the importance of maintaining harmony with the environment (29).

The spiritual dimension of ecofeminism emphasizes the healing power of nature. Many ecofeminists find solace and renewal in natural settings, believing that nature has the ability to heal physical, emotional, and spiritual wounds.

It is crucial to remember that Indian ecofeminism does not uncritically exalt the feminine and therefore implies that adopting a feminine viewpoint will assist humanity

in resolving the ecological crisis. Since a truly feminist perspective necessitates a critique of gender roles, which must include both masculinity and femininity, it cannot uncritically embrace either the feminine or the masculine.

CONCLUSION

Environmental and climate impacts are gendered because of societal and cultural structures. Ecofeminism is both an academic and activist movement. Indian ecofeminism provides a unique perspective on the intersection of environmental and feminist issues, drawing from ancient philosophies, cultural traditions, and contemporary challenges. By contrasting Indian and Western ecofeminism, we see how different cultural contexts shape the movement's focus and methodologies. Indian ecofeminism's emphasis on traditional values, holistic views, and spiritual dimensions offers a rich framework for understanding and addressing the interconnectedness of gender and environmental issues. Ecofeminism challenges the instrumental rationality of neo-globalisation. As the world faces growing ecological and social crises, revisiting and integrating these traditional insights can offer valuable guidance for creating more sustainable and equitable futures.

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Sanskrit verses:

- अपत्यं धर्मकार्याणि शुश्रूषा रतिरुत्तमा
दाराऽधीनस्तथा स्वर्गः पितृणामात्मनश्च ह ॥ (9.28 - Manusmriti)
- क्षेत्रभूता स्मृतानारी बीजभूतः स्मृतः पुमान् ।
क्षेत्रबीजसमायोगात्संभवः सर्वदेहिनाम् ॥ (9.33, Manusmriti)
- या देवी सर्वभूतेषु शक्ति-रूपेण संस्थिता (Devī Māhātmya 7.32-34), part of the
Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa)
- यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः (3.56, Manusmṛti)
- माता भूमिः पुत्रो अहं पृथिव्याः । (12.1.12, Atharvaveda)
- अर्थस्य संग्रहे चैनां व्यये चैव नियोजयेत्।
शौचे धर्मेन्नपक्त्यां च परिणाह्यस्य वेक्षणे॥ (9.11, Manusmriti)
- यादृक्गुणेन भार्या स्त्री संयुज्येत यथाविधि।
तादृग्गुणेन सा भवती समुद्रेणेव निम्नगा॥ (9.22, Manusmriti)
- उद्गललतदभभकवला मृगयाः पररत्यक्तनतभना मयूराः। अपसत् पाण्डुपत्रा मुञ्चन्त्यश्रूणीव
लताः॥ (4.12, Abhijnanashakuntalam)
- एकम् सत् विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति (1.164.46, Rigveda)