

Ecological Feminist Philosophies

Focus

- ❖ Connection between feminism and environment (in the field of environmental ethics)
- ❖ Connection between domination of women and domination of nature.
- ❖ Feminist ecological movement

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is a political philosophy and social movement that combines feminism and environmentalism, and focuses on the relationship between nature and women

- ❖ The term 'ecofeminism' was coined by the French author/feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974.
- ❖ For d'Eaubonne the term was meant to describe how the human race could be saved by women initiating an ecological revolution, as a way to counter the oppression of women that is one and the same as the oppression and destruction of nature.
- ❖ Ecofeminism is ecological because the preservation of ecosystems is a prime objective, and feminist on the basis that it offers up ways to recognize and counter male favoritism.

Ecological feminist philosophy

- ❖ “Ecological feminism” – a variety of different feminist perspectives which focuses on the nature of the connections between the domination of women (and other oppressed humans) and the domination of nature.
- ❖ “Ecological feminist philosophy” is a philosophical approaches emphasising to the variety of different connections between feminism and the environment.
- ❖ The different perspectives of feminist perspectives are liberal, traditional Marxist, radical, and socialist feminism.
- ❖ What all ecofeminist philosophers do hold in common, however, is the view that there are important connections between the domination of women (and other human subordinates) and the domination of nature and that a failure to recognize these connections results in inadequate feminisms, environmentalism, and environmental philosophy.

Connection between feminism and environment

❖ Historical and causal:

Ecofeminism is a recent development in feminist thought which argues that the current global environmental crisis is a predictable outcome of patriarchal culture (Salleh 1988, 138, n.1).

Some ecofeminists (Spretnak 1990; Reisler 1988) trace the historical and causal connections to prototypical patterns of domination begun with the invasion of Indo-European societies by nomadic tribes from Eurasia about 4500 B.C. (Lahar 1991).

Riane Eisler describes the time before these invasions as “matrifocal, matrilineal, peaceful agrarian era.” Others (e.g., Griffin 1978; Plumwood 1991; Ruether 1975) focus on the historical role played by rationalism and important conceptual dualisms in classical Greek philosophy.

Still other feminists (e.g., Merchant 1980, 1989; Shiva 1988) focus on cultural and scientific changes that occurred during the scientific revolution and sanctioned the exploitation of nature, unchecked commercial and industrial expansion, and the subordination of women.

Structures of domination

****REFER NOTES****

- ❖ Ecofeminists and ecological feminist philosophers (e.g., Griffin 1978; Merchant 1980, 1990; Plumwood 1986,) have argued that, ultimately, historical and causal links between the dominations of women and of nature are located in conceptual structures of domination and in the way women and nature have been conceptualized, particularly in the western intellectual tradition.
- ❖ Twin dominations of women and nature in value dualisms, i.e., disjunctive pairs in which the disjuncts are seen as oppositional (rather than as complementary) and exclusive (rather than as inclusive), and value hierarchies [hierarchically organized value dualisms include reason/emotion, mind/body, culture/nature, human/nature, and man/woman dichotomies]
- ❖ One role of feminism and environmental ethics, then, is to expose and dismantle these dualisms and to rethink and reconceive those mainstay philosophical notions (e.g., reason, rationality, knowledge, objectivity, the self as knower and moral agent) which rely on them.
- ❖ Oppressive patriarchal conceptual frameworks-ones undergirding all social “isms of domination,” e.g., racism, classism, heterosexism, sexism as well as “naturism,” or the unjustified domination of nonhuman nature (see Warren 1987, 1988, 1990).

Value dualism claims that one substance is more important than the other.

Empirical and experiential

- ❖ Many ecofeminists and ecological feminist philosophers have documented empirical evidence linking feminism and the environment.
- ❖ Some ecofeminists and ecofeminist philosophers cite experiential connections which honor and celebrate important cultural and spiritual ties of women and indigenous peoples to the earth (see Allen 1986, 1990)
- ❖ Critical Theory provides a critique of the “nature versus culture” and an epistemological structure for critiquing the relationship between the domination of women and the domination of nature (see Sallch 1988; Mills 1987, 1991).

Critical Theory looks at how we think about "nature versus culture" and gives us a way to criticize how women and nature are dominated.

Symbolic

- ❖ Many ecofeminists (Murphy 1990; Salleh 1988) explore the symbolic association and devaluation of women and nature that appears in art, literature, religion, and theology.
- ❖ Other ecofeminists explore the symbolic connections between sexist and naturist language, i.e., language which inferiorizes women and nonhuman nature.
- ❖ This may involve raising questions about whether the sex-gendered language used to describe “Mother nature”.
- ❖ Nature is often described in female and sexual terms: Nature is raped, mastered, conquered, controlled, mined. Her secrets are penetrated and her womb is put into the services of the “man of science.”

Ecofeminist philosophical ethic

- ❖ Much of the ecological feminists' philosophical literature on feminism and the environment has linked the two ethically.
- ❖ The claim is that the interconnections among the conceptualisations and treatment of women, animals, and (the rest of) nonhuman nature require a feminist ethical analysis and response.
- ❖ Minimally, the goal of feminist environmental ethics is to develop theories and practices concerning humans and the natural environment which are not male-biased and which provide guide to action in the prefeminist present (see Warren 1990).
- ❖ They all recognize important connections between the indefensible treatment of women and of nature, and they involve a commitment to developing ethics which are not male-biased.

On the Domination of Nature

These criticisms, focusing on how nature is controlled, go further than just condemning the ecological crisis. They show a link between dominating nature, social control, and psychological control.

❖ These critiques, based on the domination of nature, go beyond the mere condemnation of the ecological crisis to reveal a connection between the domination of nonhuman nature, social domination, and psychological domination.

❖ They argue that as nature comes to be viewed as nothing more than the material for human domination, we develop an anthropocentric view in which we see ourselves as "the measure of all things".

They say that when we start seeing nature only as something to control, we start thinking humans are the most important.

❖ Nature becomes an external Other, merely the "stuff of domination".

Nature becomes something separate from us, just something to control.

- ❖ Marx's critique of capitalist exploitation is renewed and extended in a critique of the domination of nature that attempts to uncover the psychic and social basis of the solidification of repressive society.
- ❖ The domination of nature is shown to entail social and psychic consequences that result in ecological crises, patriarchal domination, and repressive political forms in both capitalist and socialist societies.
- ❖ Instrumental reason is revealed as the specific form of reason through which nature is mastered.

They point out that using nature only for our benefit is a kind of thinking called instrumental reason.

Ecofeminism and religion

- ❖ Sandilands (1991:93 in Besthorn and McMillen 2002) describes *spiritual ecofeminism* as

Sandilands (1991) defines spiritual ecofeminism as the revival of nature's sacredness and the recognition of the divine feminine in all living things.

...the resacralization of Nature, of the divine feminine inherent in all living beings. It is seen as part of a process of reconnection, a reestablishment of ways of knowing and being in the world that have been lost in the history of patriarchal domination.

It's viewed as a way to reconnect with lost ways of understanding and existing in the world due to patriarchal dominance.

- ❖ The idea that women are, because of their womanhood, spiritually close to nature is central to ecofeminist thought, and is manifested in many forms of (nature) religion—both in the west and the east—often in the form of worshipping the inner goddess that resides in women.

Exoteric means knowledge that is accessible and shared among the general public, while esoteric means knowledge that is private, obscure, and exclusive

Women in Nature

Cosmology is the study of the universe's structure, evolution, and origin

- ❖ From the point of view of Indian cosmology, in both the exoteric and esoteric traditions, the world is produced and renewed by the dialectical play of creation and destruction, cohesion and disintegration.
- ❖ Nature, both animate and inanimate, is thus an expression of energy (Shakti), the feminine and creative principle of the cosmos; in conjunction with the masculine principle (Purusha), nature (Prakriti) creates the world.

In contemporary Western perspectives, there's often a division between man and nature, as well as between man and woman.

Man and Nature: Western vs Indian

Dichotomy is a noun that means the division of something into two parts, where the two parts are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive

- ❖ Contemporary western views of nature are fraught with the dichotomy or duality between man and woman, and person and nature.

In Indian cosmology, on the other hand, there's a unity between man and nature (known as Purusha-Prakriti). They're seen as inseparable parts of a whole. This unity extends to both men and women.

- ❖ In Indian cosmology, by contrast, person and nature (Purusha-Prakriti) are a duality in unity. They are inseparable complements of one another in nature, in woman, in man.

This unity is reflected in all forms of creation, showing diversity within a unifying principle. This harmony between male and female principles, and between nature and humanity, forms the foundation of ecological thinking and practices in India.

- ❖ Every form of creation bears the sign of this dialectical unity, of diversity within a unifying principle, and this dialectical harmony between the male and female principles and between nature and man, becomes the basis of ecological thought and action in India.

Environment as Resource

- ❖ The Cartesian concept as 'environment' or a 'resource' – see Dualism is the idea that reality is made up of two fundamental elements or principles environment as separate from man: the action of bringing someone or something under domination or control The dualism between man and nature has allowed the subjugation of the latter by man and given rise to a new world-view in which nature is (a) inert and passive; (b) uniform and mechanistic; (c) separable and fragmented within itself; (d) separate from man; and (e) inferior, to be dominated and exploited by man.

This perspective leads to a rupture between humans and nature, transforming nature from a life-sustaining force into something to be exploited.


- ❖ The rupture within nature and between man and nature, and its associated transformation from a life-force that sustains to an exploitable resource characterises the Cartesian view.
- ❖ Ecological ways of knowing nature are necessarily participatory. Nature herself is the experiment and women, as silviculturalists, agriculturists and water resource managers, the traditional natural scientists.

Ecological understanding of nature involves participation. Women, as traditional natural scientists like silviculturalists and agriculturists, have knowledge that reflects the diversity of natural ecosystems and cultural practices related to living with nature.

- ❖ Their knowledge is ecological and plural, reflecting both the diversity of natural ecosystems and the diversity in cultures that nature-based living gives rise to.

Nature and women as producers of life

The term "Third World" is used to describe countries that are poor or developing

- ❖ With the violation of nature is linked the violation and marginalisation of women, especially in the Third World.
- ❖ Women produce and reproduce life not merely biologically, but also through their social role in providing sustenance.
the ability to meet people's basic needs, such as food, shelter, health, and protection
- ❖ All ecological societies of forest-dwellers and peasants, whose life is organised on the principle of sustainability and the reproduction of life in all its richness, also embody the feminine principle.
- ❖ Maria Mies has called women's work in producing sustenance the *production of life* and views it as a truly productive relationship to nature, because 'women not only collected and consumed what grew in nature but they *made things grow*.'

conceive: form or devise (a plan or idea) in the mind.

- ❖ Women's interaction with nature, with their own nature as well as the external environment, was a reciprocal process. They conceived of their own bodies as being productive in the same way as they conceived of external nature being so.

While women interact with nature, this interaction isn't about dominating or owning nature.

- ❖ Although women appropriate nature, their appropriation does not constitute a relationship of dominance or a property relation.
- ❖ Women are not owners of their own bodies or of the earth, but they co-operate with their bodies and with the earth in order 'to let grow and to make grow'.
- ❖ As producers of new life they also became the first subsistence producers and the inventors of the first productive economy, implying from the beginning social production and the creation of social relations, i.e. of society and history.

Through bearing children and sustaining life, women were among the earliest producers, initiating social production and the creation of societal relationships and history.

Gender-ideology vs. the recovery of the feminine principle

We view "masculine" and "feminine" as concepts shaped by society and culture. Some ideologies present these categories as biologically fixed.

- ❖ We see the categories of 'masculine' and 'feminine' as socially and culturally constructed. A gender-based ideology projects these categories as biologically determined.

- ❖ The western concept of masculinity that has dominated development and gender relations has excluded all that has been defined by culture as feminine and has ^{justified} legitimised control over all that counts as such.

Simone de Beauvoir believed that feminine and masculine traits were biologically determined. She argued for women's liberation through the masculinization of females, advocating for freedom from biological constraints and what she saw as the "bondage to life's mysterious processes."

- ❖ Simone de Beauvoir – feminine and masculine as biologically established. Women's liberation is prescribed as the masculinisation of the female – women's freedom consists in freedom from biology, from 'bondage to life's mysterious processes'.

- ❖ It consists of women 'battling against the elements', and becoming masculine.

❖ As Mies points out, the patriarchal myth of man-the-hunter implies the following levels of violence in man's relationship with nature:

1) The hunters' main tools are not instruments with which to produce life but to destroy it. [This gives hunters a power over living beings, both animal and human, which does not arise out of their own productive work]

2) The objective relationship mediated through arms, therefore, is basically a predatory or exploitative one.

- The objective relationship to nature mediated through arms constitutes a relationship of dominance and not of co-operation between hunter and nature.

'Appropriation of natural substances,' as described by Marx, transforms into a one-sided process, establishing property relations that exploit nature rather than humanizing it.

- 'Appropriation of natural substances' (Marx) now also becomes a process of one-sided appropriation, of establishing property relations, not in the sense of humanisation, but of exploitation of nature.

- ❖ Mies concludes that while the patriarchal paradigm has made man-the-hunter an exemplar of human productivity, he is 'basically a parasite - not a producer'.

Women in the forest

- ❖ Forests have always been central to Indian civilization
 - They have been worshipped as **Aranyani** (the Goddess of the Forest), the primary source of life and fertility, and the forest as a community has been viewed as a model for societal and civilizational evolution.
- ❖ As a source of life nature was venerated as sacred and human evolution was measured in terms of man's capacity to merge with her rhythms and patterns intellectually, emotionally and spiritually.
- ❖ The forest thus nurtured an ecological civilization in the most fundamental sense of harmony with nature.

A critique of gender analysis

- ❖ Shiva's 1998 volume, *Rajhni Kothari* calls attention to “[...] her often explicit and often implied equivalence between women and nature, as if all women are by definition conservationist, life-enhancing and equity-seeking [...]” (p.7).

Shiva's work has drawn criticism for equating women with nature, implying that all women are inherently conservationist and equity-seeking. Some argue against the notion that tradition alone can ensure sustainable resource management. Additionally, ecofeminism is criticized for sometimes presenting a simplified and fixed idea of women.

- ❖ With respect to Shiva's line of spiritual ecofeminism, and also towards the many that see tradition as the 'savior' of sustainable natural resource management, there are many counterarguments to be aware of.
- ❖ Ecofeminism also has a tendency to focus on an essentialized idea of women.

The *Chipko* Environmental Conservation Movement, India

- ❖ Chipko means tree hugging or “embrace” as the villagers hugged the trees [Locally it is called as *Angwal*].
- ❖ The movement is best known for its tactic of hugging trees to prevent them being cut down and to prevent commercial timber harvesting.

Background

- ❖ Government's decision to allot forest trees to a sports goods company.
- ❖ The local residents in Gopeshwar were denied the similar demand of getting few trees, required for making farm tools.
- ❖ Mr. Chandi Prasad Bhatt of ‘Dasoli Gram Swarajya Sangh’(DGSS) wanted to establish small industries using forest resources, with an aim to provide job opportunities to local youth and check migration.

Leaders of the Chipko Movement

Marxists believe that economic and social conditions, and especially the class relations that derive from them affect every aspect of an individual's life, from religious beliefs to legal systems to cultural frameworks.

- Two local activists -- Chandi Prasad Bhatt, a Marxist, and Sundar Lal Bahuguna, a Gandhian, led the Chipko movement, albeit somewhat independently (Shah, 2008).

“Let them know we will not allow the felling of a single tree. When their men raise their axes, we will embrace the trees to protect them.” -- Chandi Prasad Bhatt

“Our movement goes beyond the erosion of the land, to the erosion of human values. The center of all this is humankind. If we are not in a good relationship with the environment, the environment will be destroyed, and we will lose our ground. But if you halt the erosion of humankind, humankind will halt the erosion of the soil.” -- Chandi Prasad

Gaura Devi (an elderly woman)

- ❖ Head of the village Mahila Mangal Dal.
prepare and organize (troops) for active service.
- ❖ Mobilized village women for the movement when company men marched to cut the trees.

Gaura Devi declared:

“The forest nurtures us like a mother; you will only be able to use your axes on it but you have to use them first on us.”

The Chipko Movement

- ❖ The Chipko environmental conservation movement in India came to public attention in April 1973 when a group of women in Mandal village, located in the mountainous Himalayan region of Uttarkhand, “hugged” trees in order to prevent them from being felled (Routledge, 1993)
- ❖ In the next several years, more than a dozen confrontations between women and prepare and organize (troops) for active service. lumberjacks occurred in Uttarkhand – all non-violent and effective, enshrining forever the term “tree hugger” in conservation parlance (Shepherd, 1982).
- ❖ In 1974, a remarkable confrontation occurred in Reni Village of Uttarkhand, where a women’s group led by Ms. Gaura Devi, blocked an army of lumberjacks, singing: “This forest is our mother’s home; we will protect it with all our might”.

Cont.

- ❖ They admonished the lumberjacks: “If the forest is cut, the soil will be washed away. Landslides and soil erosion will bring floods, which will destroy our fields and homes, our water sources will dry up, and all the other benefits we get from the forest will be finished” (Bhatt, 1992).
- ❖ The notion of “Cut me down before you cut down a tree,” generated a lot of media coverage, bringing with it a new humanized morality to abstract environmental concerns (Guha, 1989).
- ❖ Ghanshyam Sailani emerged as the poet laureate of Chipko, penning such verses as:

“Let us protect and plant the trees

Go awaken the villages

And drive away the axemen.”

- ❖ The Chipko movement gathered rapid momentum as it rode the wave of spirituality.
- ❖ *Bhagwad kathas* (large prayer meetings) were routinely organized in forest areas of Uttarkhand, emphasizing that God resides in every living being, including in trees.
- ❖ To protect the trees was a sacred act, blending environmental science with deeply-ingrained spirituality.

Different Ideologies

fodder: something fed to domestic animals. especially : coarse food for cattle, horses, or sheep

- ❖ The feminist movement popularized Chipko, pointing out that poor rural women walk long distances to collect fuel and fodder, and thus are the frontline victims of forest destruction (Shah, 2008).
- ❖ The Gandhians accentuated the Chipko movement through symbolic protests such as prayers, fasting, and *padayatras* (ritual marches) (Shah, 2008).

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