

## ECOFEMINISM: THE ETHICS AND AESTHETICS

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*Abstract— Ecofeminism as an ethics and an aesthetics is a movement that is born out of combination and union of feminist and ecological currents of thoughts. However, it is a new theory of the feminist movement that has evolved of political activism in the 1980's. It is a movement in which women and nature have a close connection and inherent affiliation. It defines the relationship between the discovery and degradation of the natural world and the subjugation and exploitation of woman.*

*This article attempts to study the concepts and origin of ecofeminism and its perspectives. In addition, it also explores the contributions of ecofeminist authors whose work bridges theory and activism, offering transformative frameworks that challenge systemic inequalities and champion sustainability, equity, and respect for both women and nature with reference to ethics and aesthetics related to women and nature. This article focuses on the vital role of women in the fight for ecological justice. By amplifying women's voices and exploring their identities, as well as recognizing their integral relationship with the environment, these authors offer visions of a more equitable and harmonious world.*

**Keywords—** Ecofeminism, Ecology, Women, Nature, Environment, Social equity.

### I. INTRODUCTION

As a literary philosophy, ecofeminism gives a platform and fresh avenues for addressing women's marginalization in society. It presents a multi-layered approach to women's studies. The emergence of ecofeminism as a literary theory introduces fresh avenues for exploring women's studies through a multi-dimensional lens. It offers a framework to examine the marginalization of women in society and culture while drawing connections to environmental degradation. As a theoretical approach, ecofeminism suggests that the exploitation of both women and non-human nature is intertwined, as both are categorized as "other" by the prevailing patriarchal structures. It asserts that the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature are closely linked, stemming from a shared subjugation under dominant patriarchal ideologies.

*"Ecology, the science that studies the relations of living beings among themselves and the physical environment in which they are evolving, includes, by definition, the relations between the sexes and the ensuing birth-rate. Because of the horrors which menace us, the most intense interest is oriented toward the exhaustion of resources and the destruction of the environment- which is why it is time to recall that other element, the one which so closely ties together the question of women and of their combat"*

(d'Eaubonne, 1974).

Therefore, addressing both ecology and women's issues is required to trace the problem of both the deterioration of the environment and also the oppression of women. The study of both women and ecology under one critical term leads to wide critical debate. Feminism through its long journey attempts to address the subjectivity of women. On the other hand, the study of ecology' has resulted in the critical debate of placing Nature as the subject or the other

As Ecofeminism deals with both political and Intellectual Movements, it breaks the barrier of the boundaries of multiculturalism. It can be depicted as a universal issue that influenced different writers and activists throughout the world to put their benefaction through different means. Many writers all over the world contributed significantly to the field of Ecofeminism through writing Literature with special reference to ethics and aesthetics.

### II. OBJECTIVES

1. To discuss the concept and origin of Ecofeminism and its perspectives.
2. To find out the contribution of Ecofeminist writers with special reference to ethics and aesthetics.

### Method

The study has applied a qualitative research method. In this context, the thematic and narrative analysis procedure,

including a comparative approach have been conducted. The researcher used a thematic and narrative analysis procedure including comparative analysis to draw the conclusions. The study also highlighted the different ecologists' views along with the contribution of writers with special reference to ethics and aesthetics. using Interpretative Techniques.

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This article based on the objectives reviewed various literature and research findings to draw a conclusion. In this context, it specially focuses on Ecofeminism theories from a historical prospective and discusses its origin compared with current understanding. Further, it discusses the various literatures produced by ecofeminist writers who contributed a lot to literature with special reference to women and nature.

#### Concept and Origin of Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is a relatively modern movement, with the term first coined in 1974 by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne. The movement gained momentum through a series of workshops and conferences held in the United States during the late 1970s and early 1980s, primarily attended by professionals and scholars. These gatherings aimed to explore how feminism and environmentalism could be combined to promote equality and ecological sustainability.

During these discussions, participants argued that the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature stem from their historical association. Women and nature have often been portrayed as irrational and disorderly, while men have been characterized as rational and controlled. Ecofeminists contend that this perception has contributed to a hierarchical system that grants power to men while justifying the subjugation of both women and the environment.

In her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (1974), Françoise d'Eaubonne expanded on this idea, linking the oppression of marginalized groups—including women, people of colour, children, and the poor—to the degradation of nature, encompassing animals, land, water, and air. She argued that Western patriarchal systems, through their history of oppression, domination, exploitation, and colonization, have caused severe and often irreversible environmental destruction. As an activist and organizer, d'Eaubonne emphasized the need to dismantle all forms of social injustice, not just those related to gender and the environment.

This perspective was further developed through influential works such as *Women and Nature* by Susan Griffin (1978), *The Death of Nature* by Carolyn Merchant (1980), and *Gyn/Ecology* by Mary Daly (1978). These texts reinforced the link between the domination of women and the exploitation of nature. During the 1980s, feminist activism increasingly incorporated ecological concerns, with women leading movements focused on environmental

and public health issues. Organizations such as the National Toxics Campaign, Mothers of East Los Angeles (MELA), and Native Americans for a Clean Environment (NACE) were at the forefront of these efforts. Ecofeminist writers also engaged with Green Party politics, peace activism, and direct action movements.

Modern ecofeminism sometimes referred to as feminist eco-criticism, moves away from earlier essentialist views. Instead, it emphasizes intersectionality, examining how the division between nature and culture contributes to the oppression of both women and nonhuman entities.

#### *Perspectives on Ecofeminism*

Over the past three decades, numerous movements, protests, and activities have emerged in response to ecological crises, playing a key role in the rise of ecofeminism as an evolving theory. This concept is reflected in *Silent Spring*, where Carson (2000) exposes the dark side of technological progress, particularly its harmful environmental impact through toxic chemicals and wildlife destruction in America. She argues that humans and nature are fundamentally interconnected—neither can exist without the other—emphasizing the need for balance and mutual limitations.

Spiritual ecofeminist and Wiccan priestess Starhawk (2002) introduces three core aspects of earth-based spirituality. "Immanence" suggests that the Goddess is present in all life forms, from humans to animals and plants. "Interconnection" highlights the unity of natural cycles, while a "compassionate lifestyle" promotes mutual care. She urges women to support environmental activism. Similarly, Carol Christ (1997) advocates replacing patriarchal religious traditions with Goddess-centered spirituality, believing this shift can restore harmony between humans and nature by dismantling hierarchy and dualism.

Merchant (1980) traces the ecological crisis and women's oppression to the Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While science, technology, and capitalism signify progress, they have also fuelled environmental exploitation. Plumwood (1993, 2002) identifies dualism, rationalism, free-market capitalism, and consumer-driven economies as key contributors to the domination of both women and nature.

Susan Griffin (1980) critiques androcentric attitudes, arguing that all living beings—human and non-human—deserve equal rights as they rely on the same essential resources: sunlight, air, water, and land. She draws parallels between environmental destruction and the oppression of women. Karen J. Warren (1997) attributes domination to various systems of oppression—racism, classism, heterosexism, militarism, and naturism—all rooted in patriarchy and male privilege.

Adams (2010) broadens ecofeminism to include animal oppression, linking sexism, racism, and speciesism. She argues that meat consumption is culturally tied to

masculinity and male dominance, reinforcing traditional gender roles. Gaard (1993) asserts that ecofeminism intersects with various social justice movements, including peace, labour rights, women's healthcare, anti-nuclear activist, environmentalism, and animal liberation. The central goal is to dismantle hierarchical power structures that sustain race, class, gender, and sexuality-based oppression.

The diversity within ecofeminism reflects different perspectives on the relationship between women and nature, the nature of oppression, and potential solutions. Examining ecofeminism in the Indian context highlights significant contributions from Indian scholars.

Vandana Shiva (1989), a leading Indian ecofeminist thinker and activist, has influenced the field through works like *Ecofeminism* (Mies & Shiva, 1993), *The Violence of the Green Revolution* (1993), *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India* (2010), and *Biopiracy* (2012). She argues that women and nature share a deep connection and a history of exploitation under patriarchal systems. According to Shiva, environmental degradation and women's oppression stem from modernization, scientific advancements, and reproductive technologies.

Bina Agarwal (1992) offers a distinct perspective, challenging the notion that women are a homogenous group. She emphasizes that class, race, culture, and caste influence their experiences and argues that environmental degradation cannot be solely attributed to gender oppression—political, social, and economic factors must also be considered. Critiquing ecofeminism for ideologically linking gender and nature without addressing material realities, she proposes *Feminist Environmentalism*. This framework emphasizes how gender and class shape labour divisions, resource access, and power distribution. She highlights how marginalized communities—such as poor farmers, tribal groups, and cultivators—suffer the most from environmental destruction due to their direct dependence on nature.

Liberal ecofeminists, like liberal feminists, view environmental issues as stemming from unregulated resource exploitation and pollution. They advocate for better science, conservation, and environmental laws. Their approach emphasizes institutional reforms, arguing that with equal education, women can become scientists, environmental policymakers, and conservationists, contributing to sustainable ecological solutions.

### **Women and Nature Connections**

Ecofeminists have identified at least eight different types of connections between women and nature. These connections offer various, sometimes competing but often complementary, explanations for the interconnected oppression of both women and the environment.

One such connection is historical. When historical data is used to develop theories about the root causes of women's and nature's domination, it also becomes a causal

connection. Ariel Salleh (1997) describes ecofeminism within this historical-causal framework, stating that it is a recent feminist movement arguing that today's global environmental crisis is a predictable consequence of patriarchal culture.

Another connection is conceptual. Many scholars argue that the historical and causal links between the subjugation of women and nature are embedded in societal structures that frame both in male-cantered ways. These structures rely on value dualisms—oppositional pairs such as reason/emotion, mind/body, culture/nature, human/nature, and man/woman—that reinforce hierarchy. A further expansion of this argument situates these dualisms within a broader framework of oppression that includes sexism, racism, classism, and heterosexism. A system becomes oppressive when it legitimizes relationships of dominance and subordination and is patriarchal when it specifically justifies male dominance over women.

A related viewpoint ties these conceptual foundations to biological sex and gender differences. It suggests that women's experiences, particularly those related to reproduction and childbearing, create a unique relationship with nature. A key goal of ecofeminism, therefore, is to develop language, theories, and practices that acknowledge these differences while avoiding the exploitative tendencies of a male-identified culture.

Another significant link is empirical and experiential. This perspective highlights real-world data that demonstrate how environmental destruction disproportionately affects women. Research reveals that women bear greater health risks due to exposure to pollutants such as pesticides, radiation, and toxins. Additionally, policies related to food, forests, and water—often shaped by First World interests—make it more difficult for women to sustain themselves and their families. Feminist animal rights advocates argue that activities such as factory farming, animal experimentation, hunting, and meat consumption are deeply tied to patriarchal ideologies and practices. Some theorists draw connections between male-driven environmental exploitation and gender-based violence, including rape and pornography. By drawing on such empirical evidence, ecofeminists seek to highlight the tangible, lived experiences that illustrate the link between gender oppression and environmental degradation.

There are also symbolic connections, where the devaluation of women and nature is evident in religion, art, literature, and language. Ecofeminists analyze nature-focused literary works to uncover the ways patriarchal narratives link the exploitation of both women and the environment. For instance, scholars argue that patriarchal views have justified the domination of both by portraying nature and women in ways that invite control and exploitation. Language plays a crucial role in this, as seen in how women are often described using animal terms (e.g., cows, foxes, chicks, bitches) and nature is feminized using sexualized and exploitative metaphors (e.g., "Mother Nature" is "raped," "mastered," "conquered," and "penetrated" by science; "virgin timber" is "felled"). There is ongoing debate about

whether such language can be reclaimed as empowering or if it merely reinforces women's subordination.

Ecofeminism also emphasizes political (praxis) connections, recognizing that it is fundamentally a grassroots movement addressing urgent social and environmental issues. These include women's health, environmental justice, opposition to militarism, nuclear power, and animal rights. The different ecofeminist perspectives can be seen as efforts to analyze oppression while remaining engaged in political activism.

Ethically, ecofeminists argue that the shared marginalization of women, animals, and the environment necessitates a feminist ethical response. Many believe that existing environmental philosophies, even those that are not explicitly male-biased, remain inadequate. The various perspectives on the woman-nature relationship have led to diverse and sometimes conflicting positions in feminist and environmental thought. These connections ultimately form the foundation of ecofeminism, though they also highlight a tension between theory and activism.

Ecofeminists like Warren and Plumwood (2002) argue that the culture/nature dualism has been highly damaging and must be dismantled. Ynestra King (1995) advocates for a nuanced approach that neither outright rejects nor fully embraces the association between women and nature. Instead, she calls for an ongoing critical examination of these boundaries while working to integrate them meaningfully. To balance nature and urban life, close the gender gap, and fight against racism and sexism, ecofeminists emphasize the importance of building strong alliances with environmental justice movements. Ultimately, ecofeminism aims to create a feminist ideology that extends beyond gender and a political movement that is truly inclusive of all humanity.

### ***Reflections on Ecofeminism with regard to Women and Nature***

The contemporary patriarchal world collides with colonialism, racism and global capitalism. This disruptive intersection gives rise to the interlocking hierarchies and oppression where women and nature, in particular, are treated as subalterns. Though women try to dismantle these oppressions, they are perceived as weak and assimilated into a mass of vulnerability. Ecofeminism seeks to dismantle these interlocking oppressions and asserts that the notions of power must be reconstructed through collaborative relationships instead of an imbalanced power structure. It aims to create an interconnected community that is bereft of patriarchal and other forms of hierarchy.

The passage discusses the concept of ecofeminism and how various scholars and writers highlight the intertwined struggles of women and the environment. Shiva and Agarwal (1992) argue that women's connection to the environment is influenced by social and historical factors. In poor rural households, women often experience both the negative effects of environmental degradation and play active roles in efforts to protect and restore nature.

Authors like Gita Mehta, Dr. Nambesia, Margaret Atwood, and Alice Munro depict the challenges faced by women in their journey to find their identity. Through their characters, they convey how women, in male-dominated societies, are often victims unless they assert their self-identity. The protagonists in their works fight to understand their true selves, which ultimately empowers them with self-confidence.

Atwood and Munro, in particular, emphasize ecofeminism by showing how their female protagonists develop strength and dignity. As these characters interact with nature, men, and other women, their experiences lead to personal growth and greater enlightenment. Their stories inspire women to recognize their worth and fight against their secondary status in society, encouraging them to take pride in their abilities and work toward gender equality.

### ***The Ethics and Aesthetics***

Ethics and aesthetics are two fundamental branches of philosophy that explore different aspects of human experience—morality and beauty, respectively. While ethics deals with principles of right and wrong, guiding human behaviour and decision-making, aesthetics concerns itself with the nature of beauty, artistic expression, and sensory perception.

Despite their differences, ethics and aesthetics are deeply interconnected. Ethical considerations often influence artistic creation, shaping what is considered appropriate or meaningful in various cultures. Similarly, aesthetic values can affect ethical judgments, as beauty and harmony are sometimes linked to moral ideals. For example, in many traditions, a well-lived life is seen as not only morally good but also aesthetically pleasing in its balance and harmony.

Throughout history, philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Aristotle have explored the relationship between ethics and aesthetics, questioning whether beauty and goodness are inherently connected or if they exist independently. In contemporary discourse, these ideas remain relevant in debates over art, culture, and social justice.

Understanding ethics and aesthetics allows individuals to navigate moral dilemmas, appreciate artistic expressions, and engage with the world in a more profound and meaningful way. Ethics and aesthetics play crucial roles in literature, shaping both the moral dimensions of storytelling and the artistic qualities of literary works. Literature serves as a medium through which ethical dilemmas are explored, challenging readers to reflect on issues of right and wrong, justice, and human values. Simultaneously, the aesthetic elements of literature—such as language, form, and style—enhance its emotional and intellectual impact, making ethical inquiries more engaging and profound. Carolyn Merchant in her book "The Death of Nature" (1980) urged that-

*“The exploitation of women and nature is rooted in the same ideological system. Both are dominated by the same values: mechanistic science, patriarchy, and capitalism. Both women and nature are subjugated through the language of conquest and domination.”* (170)

Merchant's work is foundational in ecofeminism. In this excerpt, she argues that the exploitation of nature and women shares the same ideological foundation rooted in patriarchal control, scientific rationalism, and capitalist exploitation. The focus is on the ethical implications of such systemic domination. Similarly, Margaret Atwood in her *“Handmaid’s Tale”* (1985) pointed out that

*“A rat in a maze is free to go anywhere, as long as it stays inside the maze”* (165)

Atwood's dystopian novel uses the metaphor of the maze to illustrate the lack of freedom experienced by women in patriarchal societies. While not directly about the environment, the quote suggests the control and confinement of women, much like nature is confined and exploited for human gain. It hints at the ethical concept of control over both women and the environment. Vandana Shiva in her book *“Ecofeminism”* (1988) coined out that

*“Ecofeminism connects the exploitation of women and nature, arguing that both are rooted in patriarchal systems of control, ownership, and domination.”* (40)

In this foundational ecofeminist text, Shiva highlights the shared root of the exploitation of women and nature—patriarchy. Her argument frames ecofeminism as an ethical stance that challenges the exploitation of both women and the environment through a critique of societal structures. Rachel Carson in *“Silent Spring”* (1962) acclaimed that

*“In nature, nothing exists alone. The interconnectedness of life is such that all life forms, including human beings, must acknowledge the delicate balance of the environment.”* (20)

Carson's landmark work, *Silent Spring*, is often seen as the beginning of environmental consciousness in the modern era. This quote highlights the interconnectedness of all life forms, a core theme in ecofeminism that emphasizes the ethical responsibility humans, especially women, have toward the environment.

In the Novel *“The Village by The Sea”* (1982) Anita Desai examines the relationship between human beings and the natural world, focusing on a rural family in a village by the sea. Desai portrays the struggles of a young girl named Hari, whose life is shaped by the environment and her role within the family. Desai uses nature to symbolize the innocence and vulnerability of her characters. The beauty of the landscape contrasts with the exploitation of both the land and the women within the community, presenting an ethical critique of social and environmental dynamics.

*“The sea was the village’s lifeblood, and yet it was also the place of danger and destruction. There was no choice*

*but to submit to its wild rhythm, to its indifference, and to take from it whatever it offered.”* (45)

Here she also contrasts the beauty of the sea with its capacity for destruction, paralleling the hardships women face in rural communities. The sea’s power is akin to the forces of nature and society that women must endure and adapt to, often at the cost of their own agency. However,

Sashi Deshpande in her novel *“That Long Silence”* (1989) also proclaimed that

*“We think we are free, but we are prisoners of the past, of what we have been taught to believe, of the things that have been done to us.”* (170)

This line encapsulates a recurring theme in Deshpande's writing, where characters often wrestle with their inner conflicts, shaped by societal norms, personal experiences, and family expectations. Deshpande's novels delve into ethical questions that are particularly relevant to her female characters. These ethical struggles often revolve around balancing individual desires with social obligations or moral expectations imposed by family and society.

Thus, from a literary perspective, the connection between ethics and aesthetics invites a deeper engagement with literature. It encourages readers to reflect on the moral dimensions of a story while also appreciating the beauty and craft of the writing. This interplay challenges us not only to enjoy literature as an art form but to consider the broader ethical questions it may provoke, fostering a richer, more thoughtful reading experience.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Ecofeminism is both ecological and feminist. It probed capitalist, patriarchal systems that prioritize profit over the well-being of people and the planet. At its core, ecofeminism promotes values of care, cooperation, sustainability, and equity, envisioning a future where both women and nature are respected and empowered. Ecofeminism is a transformative perspective that not only critiques the exploitation of both women and the environment but also offers a framework for building more equitable and sustainable societies. By addressing the interconnected systems of domination, ecofeminism provides a pathway toward ecological balance and social justice, advocating for an ethic of care and interdependence that transcends traditional hierarchies.

The discourse on ecofeminism has been enriched by the contributions of various writers, who emphasize the deep interconnections between women and nature within their respective cultural, social, environmental, ethical and aesthetic contexts. These writers explore how patriarchal systems exploit both women and the environment, while also offering pathways toward resistance, empowerment, and ecological sustainability. Every ecofeminist perspective converges on the recognition that the exploitation of women and nature stems from patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial systems. However, they also offer distinct insights shaped

by their socio-political contexts. Some ecofeminists emphasize the importance of Indigenous ecological wisdom and reconciliation with nature, while others foreground the role of grassroots activism and the interconnected struggles of women and marginalized communities against environmental destruction.

Thus the contributions of ecofeminist writers underline the vital role of women in the fight for ecological justice. Their works bridge theory and activism, offering transformative frameworks that challenge systemic inequalities and champion sustainability, equity, and respect for both women and nature. By amplifying women's voices and recognizing their integral connection to the environment along with their quest of identities, these writers provide a vision of a more just and harmonious world.

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