

## Roots, Routes and Fruits: Feminism and Ecofeminism

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### ABSTRACT

Ecofeminism is the missing link that connects woman and nature, while tracing out the patriarchal structures of exploitation and oppression. This paper searches for the origination of 'Ecofeminism' that lies somewhere in the fusion of 'Feminism' and 'Ecology.' While defining the concept of 'Feminism', it explores its different forms along with its chronological order through wave metaphor. Feminism nurtures the sapling of Ecofeminism, and with the passage of time, it turns into a tree that bears fruits of the various forms which can be viewed through different perspectives. It presents roots, routes and fruits that come out of 'Feminism' and 'Ecofeminism.' Knowing nature leads to knowing woman, and knowing woman, leads to knowing nature. The real emancipation lies in saving the earth and woman from exploitation and oppression.

*Keywords: Feminism, Ecofeminism, Wave metaphor, Nature, Transformative Feminism, Liberal Feminism.*

'Ecofeminism' is a term, the origination of which is from Francoise d' Eaubonne's 1974 book *Le Feminisme ou la Mort*. English translation of this book is *Feminism or Death*. While discussing about the movement of 'Ecofeminism', Mary Mellor, in "Introduction" of her book, *Feminism & Ecology* writes:

Ecofeminism is a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. It emerged in the mid-1970s alongside second-wave feminism and the green movement. Ecofeminism brings together elements of the feminist and green movements, while at the same time offering a challenge to both. It takes from the green

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movement a concern about the impact of human activities on the non-human world and from feminism the view of humanity as gendered in ways that subordinate, exploit and oppress women. (1)

Mary Mellor connects 'Ecofeminism' to 'feminism' and 'the green movement.' Ecofeminism comprises two words 'Ecology' and 'Feminism.' No doubt, it originates from 'Feminism' but it differs from the term in many respects. It offers a challenge to 'Feminism' and 'Ecology.' Vandana Shiva differentiates between 'Feminism' and 'Ecology' and writes thus: "Ecofeminism is a good term for distinguishing a feminism that is ecological from the kind of feminisms that have become extremely technocratic. I would even call them very patriarchal" (Louder than Bombs 192).

There is some missing link between "the oppression of women and exploitation of nature," and this link is the link of 'Ecofeminism.' Woman and nature are in their miserable plight. The fact that it is somehow connected with the patriarchal structure is not unknown. The patriarchal structures are in favour neither of women nor of nature. Words like 'earth', 'emotions', 'unconsciousness' and 'nature' are generally associated with women, while words like 'sky', 'logic' 'consciousness' and 'capital' are connected to the male world. Dido Dunlop goes into its depth, and finds that the superior attributes are given to men, while women are tagged with the inferior attributes. She writes:

Ecofeminism adds that patriarchy devalues women, and therefore devalues nature because nature is seen as mother. Women and nature get trashed together. Anything patriarchy associates with women are also trashed: caring, compassion, mothering, emotions, looking after nature, valuing life over money. To survive the climate emergency, we need to know we're part of Mother Nature. To value nature, we must honor women too, and vice versa. ([www.permculturewomen.com](http://www.permculturewomen.com))

It is the body of the woman that is dominated and controlled. The same is true in case of the earth. The body of the earth is not only dominated but also deforested. The cause somewhere lies in the male structured society. Hence, women and earth are somewhere connected and this very connection makes them quite similar from various points of view.

'Feminism' and 'Ecology' create 'Ecofeminism', which, in return, recreates itself and becomes different in its attempt of creating a new identity. A well understanding of feminist ethics makes one think of 'Ecofeminism' well enough to take it into consideration from various perspectives.

Feminism cannot be precisely defined. It is not one and the same thing. It embraces various threads which make it one strong unit. The word 'Feminism' originates from the French word

‘Feminisme’ which includes ‘Femme’, meaning woman and ‘Isme’ meaning movement. This word is certainly linked with the welfare of women. It shows its reactions against all those men who consider women as subordinate.

Dharmendra Kumar Singh argues that “Feminism is the critique of those all patriarchal modes of thinking” which “subordinates women to men” and considers that “Generally, to look the world through the glasses of woman’s point of view considering the woman’s position in society in comparison to man and a desire to eradicate all the inequalities related to them is feminism” (Creation and Criticism).

‘Feminist’ is the word which was in use in the early nineteenth century. French socialist Charles Fourier used this word for a new kind of woman who will be “new woman.” This new woman will change herself and be changed according to the norms if they are based on association and mutual relationship. Such woman took self-emancipation into consideration along with social emancipation. Judith Astelarra Bonomi writes about ‘Feminism’ thus:

Feminism is a proposal for social transformation as well as a movement that strives to end the oppression of women....As a movement, feminism has a long history of rebellion, more or less organised, but always expressing opposition to the social institutions that made possible the inferiority of women. (71)

Here are two opposite views which reveal two opposite faces of the same feminism—one is individual face and the other is social one.

Paul Avrich says:

To me, any dependence, anything which destroys the complete selfhood of the individual, is in the line of slavery and destroys the pure spontaneity of love. (161)

Charlotte Perkins Stetson says:

To define individual duty is difficult; but the collective duty of a class or sex is clear. It is the duty of women to develop and improve themselves; to bring children into the world who are superior to their parents; and to forward the progress of the race. (313-14)

Man and woman are equal. Everyone accepts this equation and favours for the same rights for both of them. The parameter of equality is not the same even within the feminist structure. ‘To dominate’ and ‘to be dominated’ are the two domains nobody likes to be in. Rosemary Ruether talks of liberation and accepts the fact saying:

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this (modern industrial) society (204)

One, who differs in opinions from others, is considered to be a feminist. Rebecca West acknowledges this point when she declares: "I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is, I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat or a prostitute" (119).

Helene Cixous is the feminist writer who is famous for her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa." She advises women to pen about themselves. She states:

I shall speak about women's writing: about what it will do. Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Women must put herself into the text—as into the world and into the history—by her own movement. (Signs 875)

## **Different forms of Feminism**

### **Liberal Feminism**

Liberal feminism is liberal in its concept and ideology. It takes all human beings to be equal and promotes gender equality, but it follows certain framework of the mainstream society with the aim of integrating women into that framework. Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) discuss about equality for women in matters of rights and opportunities and fight for any unjust treatment that leads to women's degradation. Liberal feminists consider that there will be no women's subjugation if they are given the political and economic rights (voting rights). Gender suffering or female suffering is not a subject of discussion in liberal feminism but rights for women (be they social, economic and political) are the subject of their concern.

### **Marxist Feminism**

Marxist feminism with the second wave of feminism, emerged in 1960, holds capitalist / private property system responsible for the oppression of women and so is in favour of its dismantling

for achieving women’s liberation. Marxist feminists believe that the paired capitalism and patriarchy cause alienation in women and exploit them by not paying them for the domestic labour and sex relations. Friedrich Engels (*The Origin of the Family, Private property, and the State* (1884) and Sheila Rowbotham (*Women, Resistance and Revolution, Hidden from History: 300 years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It, Women’s Consciousness, Man’s World*) are the inspiration in the Marxist feministic structure.

Marxist feminism favours active participation of women as the active participation in productive forms of labour will provide them freedom—freedom from male exploitation and oppression—be it economic or political.

Socialist feminism comes out of the meeting of Marxism and radical feminism, as both of them often call themselves “radical” though their perspectives remain different. Social feminism rejects the Marxist’s concept of class as it believes that women oppression is somewhere entangled in the complex web of social relationship. This web of social relationship does not simply include social factors only, but it also includes economic as well as traditional paradigms of gender roles. The Chipko movement is the best instance of social movement.

### **Radical Feminism**

Radical Feminism, which takes “Patriarchy” to be the root cause of women’s oppression, emerged in 1960 in opposition of the man-made ideologies of liberal feminism and Marxist feminism. It is in favour of reordering of society—the society in which there will be no male supremacy in all the male dominating social, political and economic spheres of life. It challenges patriarchy which links sex and gender, and so attempts delinking them recommending the abolishment of male monopolized institutions.

It believes that gender roles are not natural; they are created artificially to give supreme position to men who use these gender roles as tools for domination and oppression of women. Its goal is to lead the movement towards a unisex or androgynous culture. Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1970) and Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectics of Sex* (1970) are the texts that energise radical feminism. Sisterhood becomes powerful in radical feminism, as it strongly believes in Simone de Beauvoir’s “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (273) for its strong belief in the genderless society. It intends on social change, and so takes social divisions like race, class and sexual orientation into

consideration, while considering the causes which affect women's experiences in matters of their oppression and exploitation.

### **Cultural Feminism**

Williams of Redstockings used the term "cultural feminism" to criticise it and how this term differs from its roots in radical feminism, while Alice Echols mentioned this term for "depoliticization" of radical feminism. Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* (1979) is considered to be the significant work that moves the movement from radical to cultural.

Cultural Feminism, which takes essential differences between men and women into consideration, believing in biological differences regarding reproductive capacity, talks of "female nature" or "female essence" for revaluing and redefining the attributes associated with femaleness. The attributes which are associated with femininity give a strong foundation for the building of "sisterhood, solidarity and shared identity" resulting in the shared women's culture.

"Essential differences" is the phrase that makes one to think of the gender differences that are part of the nature of man or woman. These differences may be biological or may be cultural as a result of enculturation. Cultural feminists give value to the qualities (whether of nature or culture) which make women superior to men. They consider male's nature of aggressiveness, competitiveness, and domination which is harmful for the society. They promote woman's nature of caring, cooperation, and egalitarianism useful for making a better world for all. The notion that women are "inherently kinder and gentler" becomes the very foundation on which cultural feminism rests.

Cultural Feminism gives importance to the shared values of women (be they white or black or of any other cultures) without considering sexual hierarchies and differences of women in different groups. Essentialism (the male and the female differ in essence), separatism, and the idea of a feminist vanguard (in favour of building a new culture without transforming the present one) are three cultural feminist points which are often critiqued.

A radical feminist considers the traditional family as the institution of patriarchy, while a cultural feminist will work to transform it with a focus on nurturing and caring so that it may turn into a woman-centred family. Liberal feminism critiques separatism of cultural feminism, as it believes in working within the system, while cultural feminism critiques liberal feminism

for its acceptance of male values and behavior. Cultural feminism does not believe in the idea of the oppression of women by men through class power. It traces the roots of social problems which it finds in the devaluation of women's natural tendencies.

### **Postcolonial Feminism**

Postcolonial Feminism, which originated from internal ideologies and social-cultural perspectives of the third world countries, is a critique of feminists of developed countries. It believes that women of the non-Western countries are misrepresented. It considers that racism and the effects of colonialism have affected non-white, non-Western women in the postcolonial world. Feminist theorists in developed countries talk of the universalizing tendencies of the mainstream feminist ideas, and neglect non-white, non-Western women by tagging all women in a universal group by their gender, and not recognizing them by social class, race, ethnicity, or sexual preference. Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Mohanty, and Ethel Crowley advocate postcolonial feminism.

Black Feminism and intersectional feminism criticise cultural feminists for not emphasizing the significance of race and class in the lives of women and for devaluing the ways of experiencing womanhood. Intersectional feminism, a term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw, disconnects itself from white feminism and recognizes “women's different experiences and identities” and identifies factors like gender, caste, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, disability, weight and physical appearance, etc. which may or may not be oppressing and empowering. White feminism supports white women, and does not include issues related to minority groups, particularly women of colour and LGBTQ women.

### **Eco-Feminism**

Ecofeminism fuses the two ideologies—Ecology and Feminism, offers a feminist interpretation of nature, considers patriarchy as the root cause of environmental degradation and exploitation of women, and criticizes capitalism which has created a harmful split between nature and culture leading to exploitation of both of them—women and nature.

### **Transformative Feminism**

Transformative Feminism is a feministic approach that points out the shortcomings of capitalism and patriarchy with the aim of welfare of men as well as women. F. Sow opines that

transformational feminism aspires to transcend the orthodoxies of liberal and radical feminism in an effort to evolve an inclusive and progressive feminist praxis capable of not only resisting or fighting iniquitous gender relations but also ‘transforming them’ (45). So, in addition to challenging structures of patriarchy and gender hierarchies, transformational feminism, as Campbel thinks, “promotes the interests of the subalterns; challenges (and changes) the status quo; and takes risks in the pursuit of creating a radical social change” (5).

### **Wave Metaphor**

Wave metaphor is a popular metaphor to understand the patterns of feminism. Generally, three waves are considered but the fourth wave is in the air and it is yet to be determined whether the world is in the third wave or the fourth one.

#### **First wave**

The first wave generally begins with the ‘Seneca Falls convention of 1848’ (The convention favours the cause of equality for women.) and remains up to 1920. It has its roots in liberal feminism. It attempts to attain equality for women and takes women’s suffrage in its focus. Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) and John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* (1869) are considered to be the canonical texts of the first wave.

#### **Second Wave**

The second wave generally begins with Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) though Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex* (1949) is included in the second wave because of its influence. It believes in “The personal is political”, a phrase popularized by Carol Hanisch. This wave critiques the patriarchal or male monopolized institutions and cultural practices and demands for reproductive rights, equal position with equal pay, and changes in custody laws and divorce law.

It offers a debate on sexuality, cultural inequalities, gender roles and women’s position. Unlike the first wave that was boosted mostly by the middle class and the white women, the second wave takes coloured women, women of developing nations in its flow with the aim of cementing sisterhood and solidarity to the height of turning women’s struggle into a class struggle. It flows for identity politics to demonstrate oppression, related to race, class, and gender. For Mary Mellor ‘Ecofeminism’ initiates its journey in this wave.



### **Third wave**

“Third-wave feminism”, a phrase coined by Rebecca Walker, a black bisexual woman in 1992, seeks women’s liberation and identity, and celebrates sexual diversity of race, ethnicity and class. It recognizes the black / white, poor / rich, and transgender right, gives birth to postmodern feminism, and accelerates ecofeminism. It destabilizes the various constructs like universal womanhood, body, gender, sexuality and heteronormativity.

It crosses gender boundaries, promotes experimentation, offers space for girls to define feminine beauty for themselves and shows the way how they can be subjects and not merely objects for the sexist patriarchy. The web becomes a tool for promoting “girlie feminism.” This third wave also gives space to intersectionality, (a phrase coined by Kimberle Crenshaw) revealing that different kinds of oppressions, which are based on race and gender, intersect with each other. It recognizes racial disparities within gender.

### **Fourth Wave**

The fourth wave begins around 2010. It is defined by technology, as it flows with the digital media that shares women’s perspectives. It uses facebook, twitter, instagram, youtube, and blogs in order to challenge misogyny and empower women through social justice and civil rights. Hash tags like #MeToo, #Yesallwomen, #Bringoutgirl, #Heforshe are in the air. It also takes intersectionality within its flow. This is the complex wave, as it takes many patterns which complement as well as clash with each other.

The roots of these mentioned patterns, forms and waves lie in ‘Feminism.’ These roots have routes somewhere in the male’s oppression and exploitation of the female. It is man for whom woman and nature are the same and the passive.

This male mindset is responsible for the secondary and subordinating position of women and nature. It is the right time for women to come out of their confines and take a step not only for them but also for nature. Vandana Shiva shows her concern for the future and feels that women can take stance in bringing out peace. She writes: “We are either going to have a future where women lead the way to make peace with the Earth, or we are not going to have a human future at all” (qtd. by Binuraj in The Hindu). The need is that every woman should realise that the earth is in the grip of the patriarchal web. The need is to make an end of this framework of patriarchal structure. This patriarchal structure is to be replaced by the egalitarian structure.

Susan Griffin, who is a radical feminist, feels affection for the earth. She writes about her relationship with the earth thus:

This earth is my sister; I love her daily grace, her silent daring, and how loved I am. how we admire this strength in each other, all that we have Isot, all that we have suffered, all that we know: we are stunned by this beauty, and I do not forget: what she is to me, and what I am to her. (Woman and Nature 219)

The roots of ‘Ecofeminism’ lie in ‘Feminism.’ Feminism helps in nurturing the sapling of ‘Ecofeminism.’ This sapling has turned itself into a tree with the help of ‘Ecology.’ Now, this tree has become strong enough to spread its branches. These branches bear the fruits of various shapes and forms. ‘Cultural ecofeminism’, ‘Spiritual ecofeminism’, ‘Social ecofeminism’, ‘Transformative ecofeminism’, ‘Gaia hypothesis’, etc., are some of its branches that are now bearing the fruits of benefits for mankind. Ecofeminism is neither one concept nor many concepts.

It can be viewed from various perspectives. Perspectives differ. Generally the two perspectives of ‘Ecofeminism’—essentialist (which takes pre-social and innate qualities in consideration) and constructionist (which includes its association with nature as socially constructed) are taken into consideration for demonstrating closeness to nature. Nature and women are same in their biological functions. Birth and productivity differ in name but are same. Women give ‘birth’ while nature produces ‘productivity.’ Woman and nature are controlled, dominated and exploited because of the social construction of gender. This social construction is done by the male monopolised society. Such society gives man a strong hold and controlling power, with which he dominates over nature and woman. Here lies the root cause of the problem and the birth of ‘Ecofeminism.’

Ecofeminism takes its birth from ‘Feminism’ and ‘Ecology’ for the protection of nature and woman and saving the humanity from its annihilation. The remedy lies in saving the earth and woman from being exploitation. The emancipation of nature and woman will not be the emancipation of nature and woman only but of mankind. Hence, Heather Eaton considers ‘Ecofeminism’ as “an enormously useful and flexible insight” (4). He uses the image of “a busy traffic roundabout with many roads coming in and going out” (4) for ‘Ecofeminism.’

Karen J. Warren, Carolyn Merchant, Vandana Shiva, Val Plumwood, Bina Agarwal, etc. are some of the names of ecofeminist authors who have attempted to raise the consciousness of mankind. Some ecological movements like the Bishnois and the Chipko in India, Greenham

Common Movement in Britain, Love Canal Movement in the USA have opened the eyes of the people who are now concerned about the future of mankind. Knowing nature leads to knowing woman, and knowing woman, leads to knowing nature. The need is to know nature and woman not merely through mind but through consciousness. Carolyn Merchant suggests the way of knowing nature through consciousness when she writes:

Consciousness as a way of knowing nature, however, is broader than mind alone. It encompasses knowing through the body, all the senses working together—feelings, volitions, and thought. It may refer to individual or group consciousness, hence to dominant worldviews, as well as to alternative ways of representing nature. (Earthcare xxi)

In brief, Ecofeminism sprouts from the roots, i.e. ‘Feminism’ and ‘Ecology’ which provide different routes for its movement. With the passage of time, it bears fruits that nurture nature and woman for the sake of saving beings. What Vandana Shiva shares in an interview with Amy Goodman: “The liberation of the earth, the liberation of women, the liberation of all humanity is the next step of freedom we need to work for, and it’s the next step of peace that we need to create” ([www.democracynow.org](http://www.democracynow.org)) is quite applicable in the present scenario. It is the right time to be on a journey from ‘Ecofeminism’ to ‘Ecohumanism’ via non-patriarchal routes where only humanistic feelings for beings move.

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