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Is Ecofeminism Doing Favoritism to Feminism?

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Keywords: ecofeminism; western ecofeminist discourse; Indian ecofeminist discourse; environmental crisis.

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I. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to understand ecofeminism in an Indian context through a close examination of a few major Indian environmental movements and protests. The core objective is to investigate that are Indian environmental crisis gender oriented?In a way, it is an attempt to do discourse analysis of ecofeminism in Indian context. To answer the hypothetical question, the paper is divided into two sections. First, the present paper does not depend upon the exhaustive standpoints of ecofeminism. It is delimited to its basic arguments. Therefore, to infer the basic argument the first section gives a cursory overview of ecofeminist discourse in the West. The Second section gives perspectives of Indian ecofeminists along with rumination and reflection of a few Indian environmental protests and movements which explore the ecofeminist discourse in India. Subsequently, the Indian environmental crisis is a good entry point to contemplate on Indian environmental movements which pose a question to the episteme of the Western theory building and discursive formation of the discourse.

a) Ecofeminism: A Discursive Formation

Ecofeminism, a neologism, was coined by a French feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 in her path-breaking book *Le Feminisme Ou la Mort.* Her fundamental intention was to give a call to women to save the planet. Later, the concept of ecofeminism was evolved into a theory from various academic endeavors and activist movements against destruction of environment across the globe with the diagnostic focus on women and nature. As d'Eaubonne asserts, "Ecofeminism will put an end to patriarchy and save human society from the devastation wrought on the environment, the nuclear threat and the profit-based system which is at the origin of all war and exploitation on this planet" (Eaubonne, 1999:4). Moreover, it is the outcome of ecological crisis induced by industrialization, scientific revolution and the growth of market culture.

Ecofeminism has been gradually evolving as a praxis-oriented theory. It emphasizes the oppression of women and exploitation of nature by exploring the subtle connections–based on empirical, conceptual and epistemological concepts (Eaton & Lorentzen 2003 and Warren 1996)–between the two. The primary causes of exploitation of women and nature are explained away as modernization, globalization (Eaton & Lorentzen 203), development in science and technology (Merchant 1980; Griffin 1980 and Mies and Shiva 1993), reproduction technology (Adams 1994 & 2010) and corporate agriculture (d'Eaubonne 1974 and Shiva 2010). All of them, as per most of the renowned ecofeminists, are rooted in male domination–patriarchy (Francoise 1974; Daly 1978; Merchant 1980; Griffin 1980; King 1983; Warren 1997; Plumwood1993; Gaard 1998; Adams 2010; and Mies and Siva 1993). Ecofeminism is a quilt theory as, 'it is structurally pluralistic, rather that structurally reductionist or unitary: it emerges from a multiplicity of voices, especially women's voices across cross-cultural context'(Warren 1994: 188).

Mapping the contour of Western ecofeminist perspectives, it makes clear that the root cause of exploitation of women and nature is patriarchy, which for most ecofeminists means male domination. It is being perpetuated in the form of certain social practices such as the logic of dualism (Plumwood 1993), the "isms" of domination (Warren 1994) leading to women and nature being reduced to the absent referents (Adams 2010), and the hierarchical structure of power and exploitation. Keeping these limitations in consideration, the present paper does not depend upon the exhaustive standpoints of ecofeminism. These polemical voices show that ecofeminist discourse consists of many different ideas and actions and consequently, it cannot be generalized easily. It is delimited to a few core elements of ecofeminism to examine Indian novels. That is all the perspectives of the ecofeminist discourse revolve around the basic argument: the patriarchal development attitude is the root cause of the exploitation of women and nature, women are closer to nature as well as women are the first-hand victims of

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degradation of nature. This core objective of ecofeminism is a launchpad to do discourse analysis (ecofeminism) through Indian environmental protests which tries to answer the basic argument of the paper: Are environmental crisis in India gender oriented?

b) The Western Perspectives on Environmental Crisis: A Brief Overview

Embarking on this vital theoretical underpinning of ecofeminism, which signify the role of gender in environmental histories, the present paper investigates applicability of ecofeminist discourse in the Indian context through the analysis of Indian environmental crisis. Before going to analyze the Indian environmental protest and movements, we need to have a cursory overview of a few Western movements and protests which has given a platform to this discourse to come into vogue. The peasant women protest against the proposed construction of the nuclear power plant in 1970 at Whyl in South West Germany, the Green Belt women-led Movement in Kenya. In 1978 Lois Gibbs, American environmental activists, protested against the dumping of toxic waste at Love canal because it affected ill health within her family, her friends, and neighbors. Ellen Swallow, the founder of science and ecology and established laboratory at MIT for women, propounded domestic science means primary health reasons related such as nutrition, water, sewage, and air (Eaton & Lois 13-14). The protest by Japanese women against contamination of food by chemically stimulated, commercial agriculture and for self-reliant producer-consumer networks, poor women's efforts in Ecuador to save the mangrove forests as breeding-grounds for fish and shrimp. Under the leadership of Garce Paley, in November 1980, two hundred women protested the against the bomb production that is women's pentagon action. Russian women protest against the Chernobyl catastrophe is one more example of women protest against environmental degradation. In 1992, Joan Sharp, a representative of Black Workers for justice, fought and created awareness among the Mexican workers that how the Schlage toxic chemicals usage contaminates the groundwater and causes cancer (Mies & Shiva 4).

In addition to these, we can examine a few American historians in order to investigate their perspectives on environmental crisis with especial focus on American environmental problems. They consider that in the Western countries the environmental problems are 'full stomach' phenomenon (Nash 1982), according to Hay, an American historian, discern, "safe to assume that when everyone turns environmental prosperity has truly arrived Greenness in the ultimate luxury of the consumer society" (Moore ix) as well as for American it is leisurely phenomenon. As Inglehart, a political scientist, says it is an outcome of 'postindustrial and post material society' (Inglehart 1977). The cursory glance on the ecofeminists, the ecofeminist movements, the environmentalists, and the historians give a common perspective that the environmental problems in the West are majorly related to health–the major focus is on women.

c) Ecofeminism in India: A Critical Reflection

Now, let us proceed to Indian ecofeminists perspectives and the reasons of environmental movements in India; the core objective of this section is to study Indian ecofeminists' perspectives in a nutshell as the pioneering Indian ecofeminist Vandana Shiva attacks the Western developmental attitude which has evaded Indian agrarian culture and indigenous people's knowledge about nature, which plays a vital role in Indian context. The seventy percent of Indians depend upon traditional systems of production for their survival and sustenance. Further, she argues that the global capitalist market system and the Western science and technology have destroyed sustainable way of life and biological diversity which she considers maldevelopment (Shiva 2010). Bina Agrawal says that the modern developmental attitudes impacted on indigenous knowledge and skills- peasants and tribal women- for example, the first, the modern scientific knowledge related to agriculture has excluded women from the domain by marginalizing and devaluing their indigenous knowledge and skills; the second, the degradation of natural resources degraded women position (Agrawal 1992). Next, Chhaya Datar says that liberalization, privatization, and globalization has changed rural economy by impacting on subsistence farming to cash crop farming, mix cropping to monoculture, the impact of usage of excessive chemical fertilizers, and depletion of groundwater (Datar 2011). Subsequently to have a glance on Aruna Gnanadason's argument related to exploitation of women and nature such as liberalization of the economy and privatization of every sector is grabbing the life and livelihood of the farmers. Ruether's observation in this context is very apt to study that Southern ecofeminists are primarily concerned with the "concrete reality of day-to-day life" (Eaton & Lois viii).

On the basis of the discussion of the Western and Indian ecofeminists and environmentalists, the paper deciphers that the western thinking, by and large, has tried to formulate the ecological crisis or the environmental problem from the point of view of feminism. The underlying assumption of this formulation is that nature and woman are exploited by patriarchal power relations. Another reason may be the rise of ecological consciousness coincides with feminist consciousness.

II. Rumination on Indian Environmental Crisis

For proper orientationof this underlying assumption in India, we need to examine synchronic snapshots of Indian environmental crisis by putting forth

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a question to ruminate: Are Indian environmental problems gender related? This will be a substructure to this paper.

India also witnessed a large number of environmental movements and protests. In India, environmental problems are not solved in isolation–gender analysis–because natural resources are the effective means of survival for the majority of Indians. The first epoch-making Chipko movement led the peasants of the Garhwal Himalaya region to protest against the commercial felling of trees by hugging the trees (Gadgil&Guha1994; Rao 2012). Himalaya is dying due to the onslaughts of aggressive developments in the form of damming the rivers, deforestation, mining and luxury tourism. The basic reason for the Chipko movement was minerals, soils and forest of the Uttarakh and region which attracted many entrepreneurs. This movement had taken birth in 1964 in Gopeshwar in Chamoli district in the form of *Dasoli Gram Swarajya Sangh* (DGSS). This organization was founded by an Indian Gandhian environmentalist and social activist Chandi Prasadd Bhatt who was one of the pioneer protesters. The initiation of the first protest of Chipko movement was against the local operators who wanted to cut the Ash trees. Later, the Ash trees were sold to a sports goods manufacturing company for the purpose of making bats and tennis rackets. The villagers initially appealed government to stop the exploitation of the forest; but their plea fell on the deaf ears. Therefore, the villagers adopted a non-violent protest against the felling of the trees. Indeed, the Chipko movement was led by women hugging the trees to save them. However, men also plays very vital and prominent role in this protest including Gaura Devi, Sudaresh Devi, Bachni Devi,Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Sundarala Bahuguna, Govind Singh Rawat, Doom Singh Negi, Ghanasyam Raturi, etc. In the context of historical background to the movement, Bahuguna says. "It was in 1930 that people in our area revolted against the commercialization of the forests. To suppress that rebellion, on 30th May 1930 the army was sent by the rulers of the State. As many as 17 persons were shot dead, about 80 arrested. Though the movement was then suppressed,-we got inspiration from them. We established a memorial to those martyrs. In 1969, we repeated a pledge in front of their memorial. This became the background of Chipko." (Bahuguna 1997: 17)

The Chipko Movement was led by women and women hugged trees from felling down from the government's project of mining. However, men also were part of this movement; almost every section of the people participated in this movement the prominent among them was Sundarlal Bahuguna. As Sudarlal Bahuguna, "The objective of this policy should be to heal the wounds of the Himalaya, keep it as a place to live for the local inhabitants and accessible to nature lovers and spiritual seekers, use natural resources in a sustainable manner to achieve regional self-sufficiency, keep the landscape intact, protect biodiversity and establish local autonomy for the advancement of culture. This will save both the nature and culture of these great mountains, a source of varied inspiration to humankind." (Bahuguana 1998:18) Therefore, the protest was not gender oriented, it was humankind oriented. There were foot marches of 4870 km from Kashmir to Kohima. It took 300 days to create the awareness of the impact of deforestation on their livelihood. Before this one more movement started in the Karnataka in Kunsur village in the Dharwad district of the Sothern state. The protest was against the allotment of the pasture land of the village to a polyfiber industry by the state which intended to grow eucalyptus on it and both men and women both equally participated in it (Gadgil and Guha 1994).

Another grass-root movement that launched a protest against the building of large dam on the Narmada River–which is considered to be one of the most catastrophic environmental disasters in the world–was the *Narmada BachaoAndolan* (Save the Narmada River Movement) (Rao 2012). In this protest also men and women equally participated, as Bahuguna says, "When the work on the dam started in 1978, many men and women went to stop the work and were arrested and sent to jail. The whole area was converted into a police cantonment so that the people could not do anything. The government said that they would hold talks, but nothing came out of them" (Bahuguna 1997). Further, Bahuguna adds, "We have been camping in a hut for last four years near the dam site in non-violent protest and have been able to stop the work twice. Twice I fasted to make the government realize the need for a review of the technical, social, economic, cultural, ecological and spiritual aspects of the project." (Bahuguana 1998) Next, there emerged various protests against mining projects, for example, in 1947 in the Doon valley in northwest India, and more recently in 1983 the Gandhamardan hills of Sambalpur district in Odisha. Such struggles sought to draw attention to the irreversible consequences such as deforestation, the drying up of water resources, and loss of agrarian lands (Gadgil&Guha1994).

Save Silent Valley, a social movement, was started in 1973 to save an evergreen tropical forest in the Palakkad district of Kerala, India from a hydroelectric project (Chengappa 2009).The land filling of hundreds of acres of water-beds and mangrove forests in Ernakulam district was to build a cricket stadium which created a lot of pernicious problems (Joseph 2011). Besides, in the year 1984 the pesticide factory of Bhopal–owned by the multinational company Union Carbide–accidentally released deadly toxic gas which had taken a heavy toll on the lives of many people and caused massive damage to plant and animal lives. And

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there were long lasting aftermath effects on survivors (Mukherjee 2010).

Moreover, in the year 2007, a malicious incident took place, when the state government of West Bengal signed a memorandum of understanding with the Salim industrial group of Indonesia to build a gigantic 'chemical hub' on the cultivated land. All these environmental movements project that the root cause of these problems are the modern developmental attitude. However, men and women both joined their hands together to resolve the ecological crisis.

III. Critical Deduction

On the basis of a critical rumination of Indian environmental movements and protests along with the Indian ecofeminists' perspectives, the present paper propounds that in India, there is something more than ecofeminism. That is the root cause of ecological destruction is not man; the environmental problems are not due to androcentric attitude but anthropocentric attitude. Here, we cannot accept watertight argument like only man is the root cause of exploitation of women and nature. To open up the axis of the hypothesis of the paper, we contemplate Marie Wilson frame of idea that men and women play an equal role in the nature-related issues, as the Indian environmental movements and protests are supported by men as well as women. In India, ecological problems are gender neutral. Therefore, the environmental crisis in India are not gender-oriented. In this context, it is useful to turn to Leopold's idea, "To understand the function of a hand it is necessary to understand the whole body and consider the former in an organic relation to the latter. Similarly, a human is both a member as well as the home of which (s)he is a member" (Leopold 1949:204).

Though I agree with (ecofeminism) analysis, the difference must be because of where I come from. In my mind, when I speak about women, I speak about humanity because there is equality in the Gitksan belief: the human is one species broken into two necessary parts, and they are equal. One is impotent without the other.

(Wilson 77)

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