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Green Feminism: A Study of Architects Of Ecofeminism

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Abstract

Ecofeminism is emerging as a popular environmental movement. It is basically theoretical as well as an activist movement that explores the connection between the exploitation of women and nature. The theorists argue that both women and nature suffer because of rigid patriarchal structures. It emerged in the 1970s as a response to ecological destruction due to heavy industrialization all around the world. In order to save excessive environmental degradation and gender oppression; the conscious citizens raised the demand for a holistic, sustainable and inclusive approach to environment and social justice. It is the women, especially in agrarian and indigenous societies who are closely associated with natural resources and are largely dependent on them but the onslaught of rapid development has diminished these resources thus it makes them more vulnerable to ecological destruction. Ecofeminism critiques male-dominated structures, like all the important global decision-making bodies are male-centric and they prioritize profit over environmental well-being. Ecofeminism is concerned about protection of women and nature and they advocate promotion of traditional knowledge, propagation of sustainable agriculture and eco-friendly practices as alternatives to exploitative industrialization. India has a long history of women-led environmental movements that align with ecofeminist principles. Some of the key movements are Chipko Movement (1973) which was led by rural women in Uttarakhand. Under this movement, rural women protested deforestation by hugging trees, symbolizing the deep connection between women and nature. Women form the backbone of Indian agriculture, yet they face land ownership issues and limited access to resources. Ecofeminism argues for their rights in decision-making regarding land and water conservation.

There are many prominent eco-feminists like Vandana Shiva who critiques industrial agriculture and GMOs. She firmly advocates promotion of biodiversity, organic farming and seed sovereignty. Her work highlights how global capitalist practices harm both nature and marginalized women. Women in rural India bear the brunt of climate change, as they are responsible for water collection and subsistence farming. Ecofeminism calls for gender-sensitive climate policies and recognition of women's role in environmental sustainability. Ecofeminism in India is highly relevant as it highlights the intersection of gender, ecology and social justice. It advocates for an inclusive environmental movement that recognizes women's contributions and challenges patriarchal exploitation of both nature and marginalized communities. Through movements, activism and policy interventions, ecofeminist's continue to shape India's discourse on sustainable development and gender equality.

The purpose of this research is to critically examine the foundational contributions of major theorists in the field of ecofeminism, with the aim of understanding how their philosophical, ecological and feminist perspectives have shaped the development of ecofeminist thought. By analyzing the works of influential figures such as Vandana Shiva, Val Plumwood, Carolyn Merchant, Maria Mies and others, this study seeks to trace the evolution of ecofeminism as a theoretical framework that interlinks the domination of nature with the oppression of women. This research also aims to explore the diversity within ecofeminist theory—ranging from spiritual and cultural ecofeminism to radical and socialist interpretations—and to highlight the tensions, intersections and complementarities between these approaches. Ultimately, the study endeavors to demonstrate the ongoing relevance of ecofeminist theories in addressing contemporary environmental and gender-based challenges, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the role of feminist theory in environmental ethics and activism.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Rural woman, movements, sustainable development, green politics

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INTRODUCTION

Ecofeminism as a concept can be understood from Griffin's observation. She says, "Women and nature is about memory and mutilation, female anger as power, female presence as transforming force. It embraces ritual and science, history and imagination, calling up the voices and body of our earth and restoring us to knowledge of her beauty and our own. In one of the infinite false polarities of patriarchy, both the exploiter-rapists and the sexist ecology movement have lumped women and nature together in a view negative for us both." (Griffin) It is a strong critique of the mindless exploitation of women and nature since ages. As a formal movement ecofeminism has drawn inspiration from feminism and political ecology. Ecofeminism is becoming popular both in theory and praxis due to its positive role in the society as a whole.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative and analytical approach, rooted in literary and philosophical inquiry. The study involves a critical examination of the writings, theories and contributions of major ecofeminist thinkers, including but not limited to Vandana Shiva, Val Plumwood, Carolyn Merchant, Maria Mies, Greta Gaard and Ariel Salleh. The selected theorists represent a range of ecofeminist perspectives, from spiritual and cultural interpretations to materialist and political approaches.

The methodology consists of the following steps:

Textual Analysis

Primary texts authored by the selected theorists are closely read and analyzed to extract key concepts, arguments and philosophical positions. Emphasis is placed on identifying each theorist's view on the relationship between gender and ecology.

Thematic Categorization

The research organizes the theorists' contributions according to central ecofeminist themes, such as dualism, nature-culture binaries, environmental justice, indigenous knowledge and critiques of capitalism and patriarchy.

Comparative Analysis

The ideas of the theorists are compared and contrasted to highlight areas of convergence, divergence and debate within ecofeminist discourse. Special attention is given to the geographical, cultural and ideological diversity among theorists from the Global North and South.

Contextual Interpretation

The theories are interpreted in relation to their historical, social and political contexts to better understand how these conditions shaped ecofeminist thought. This includes examining intersections with postcolonialism, environmental activism and feminist movements. Scholarly critiques and discussions of these theorists' work are consulted to understand how their contributions have been received, debated and expanded upon in ecofeminist and interdisciplinary scholarship.

This method allows for a deep, reflective and critical understanding of the foundations of ecofeminist theory and provides a nuanced view of its role in shaping contemporary thought on ecological and gender justice.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

It was French author Francoise d'Eaubonne who coined the term ecofeminism in her book *Le Feminisme ou la Mort*, which was published in 1974. She highlighted the draconian role of green politics also. Due to the popularity of eco-feminist movement, a number of new branches have emerged out of it. The continuous exploitation of women and nature by men is the focal point of ecofeminism. It examines how both nature and women are treated as

subordinate and are thus considered as something that is exploitable. It critiques the dualisms in Western thought (man/woman, culture/nature, reason/emotion) and emphasizes the need to value and respect both the environment and all gender identities. Just like nature women are also fertile, productive and they nurture their offspring.

The theorists argue that both women and nature are treated as resources to be controlled and exploited. Patriarchy is seen as a system that justifies domination over both women and nature. Ecofeminists critique capitalism for promoting consumerism and environmental destruction for profit. Western thought fundamentally places culture over nature, men over women. The ecofeminists are worried about, “the death of nature as a living organism and the substitution of the world as a machine, it meant that nature could be controlled, manipulated and exploited.” (Carolyn) Ecofeminists challenge this dualistic and hierarchical thinking. Since it is a condition of interconnected oppression hence it is the duty of women to protest against this oppression. Francoise also supports the above assertion by saying that, “the same mechanism of domination that oppresses women also exploits nature; both are subjected to the same patriarchal logic that seeks to control and dominates.” (Francois) According to them social justice and environmental justice are inseparable. With the passage of time this movement has integrated spiritualism also. They state that there are many ancient spiritual, religious and cultural practices that promote sustainability which were forgotten or looked down upon due to western modern education. Some ecofeminists emphasize spiritual connections with nature and advocate reviving ancient goddess-centered religions and indigenous perspectives. They value holistic, relational and nurturing ways of knowing and being.

There are many branches of Ecofeminism like Cultural Feminism, Vegetarian ecofeminism, spiritual ecofeminism, Material ecofeminism, Feminist political ecology etc. each branch of ecofeminism is moving towards being a full-fledged discipline because of the addition scholarly works in these fields. Like Marti Kheel has brought out ethical connections of human and nature in her scholarly work, *Nature Ethics: An Ecofeminist Perspective*. Many new theorists have also contributed to the development of Ecofeminism as a theory. For instance Greta Gaard has highlighted issues related to queer ecology, animal rights and literature that is environment centric. Her text titled, *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (1993), considered a seminal text in bringing out the horrors of exploitation of nature and subjugation of women. She states that, “the price of patriarchy is eternal vigilance; Ecofeminism is its own reward.” (Gaard 13) In this collection of essays, Janis Birkland has also propagated the idea, “Radical green philosophy is premised on the conviction that the sources of the environmental crisis are deeply rooted in modern culture and therefore fundamental social transformation is necessary if we are to preserve life on earth in any meaningful sense.” (Gaard 13) She has further elaborated on the functionality of ecofeminist movement in another important article titled as, *Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism*, stating that the role of ecofeminism is to, “peel back the layers of feminist and environmentalist resistance to ecofeminism’s analyses of the connections among racism, sexism, classism, speciesism and the environment. Recuperating ecofeminist insights of the past thirty years provides feminist foundations for current liberatory theories and activism.” (Gaard) She considers ecofeminism as an interdisciplinary field because the means of oppression are also interconnected. She also opposes the fact that ecofeminists are being criticized unnecessarily and it is done deliberately to overlook the diversity and depth of ecofeminist scholarship. She reclaims her position and challenges the charges that ecofeminists are, “essentialist, ethnocentric, anti intellectual goddess worshipper who mistakenly portrays the earth as female.” (Gaard)

Ecofeminism is not only theoretically sound but also it is equally practically strong. It promotes sustainable practices, community-based environmental care and gender equity. In

practice, they spread awareness through art, literature, activism, social justice movement, philosophy and through political discourse. They explore ancient practices that were environment friendly. Judi Bari was a pioneer in earth movement. She re-valued ancient non-patriarchal structures. She tried to bring awareness among the masses about the associations between women and nature.

The rapid mindless growth in industrialization by the western countries led to spiritual poverty of various societies across the globe. The use and throw culture promoted by USA was emulated by other countries as well which turned earth into a large garbage bin. The spiritual poverty not only damaged the environment but also caused many physical and mental illnesses to human beings. Sandra Harding and other feminist philosophers of science say it is because of the rise in, "science and technology have played a leading role in worldwide patriarchal dominance. The supposed value-neutrality and objectivity of scientific method has cloaked science and its resulting technological advances in an era of certainty and inevitability." (Sandra) If closely observed, it is found that the benefits of science and technology are still in the hands of coterie of few wealthy businesses and political houses. For example, YouTube can withdraw any video from its platform if it doesn't agree with the political ideology of its owner. Similarly, Twitter, Fb and other such powerful houses or companies can also alter the social and political scenario of any country at any point of time.

Mindless application of science has damaged nature rather than protected it. The advancements in technology have proven suffocating for the environment. The anthropocentrism shown by men in particular has led to pollution of air, water and soil. Military technology and nuclear threat is another nuisance. The invention of plastic was once hailed as a scientific marvel but now it has become a global pollutant. It has affected oceans and wildlife beyond repair. Similarly, use of pesticides has increased crop yield but it has degraded soil and contaminated water. Science driven by profit and control has harmed the planet. Unchecked consumption and plastic packaging has poisoned the land with toxic chemicals.

Harding and others have argued, "it is important to recognize the validity of non-Western and indigenous methods of acquiring knowledge. It is also necessary to acknowledge that social contexts and value systems influence all forms of knowledge production, including Western science, so that these practices and their results can be properly examined and critiqued." (Harding) Science could have acted as an equalizer among race, class, gender and cultures but to a great extent it has widened gap among them. If there will be no critique of this widening gap then science and technology will continue to be a source of exploitation. Rich nations will continue to oppress poor nations.

Val Plumwood was an Australian ecofeminist recognized for her contributions to the critique of anthropocentrism. Since the 1970s, she was instrumental in advancing radical ecosophy. Primarily working as an independent scholar, she held academic positions at the University of Tasmania, North Carolina State University, the University of Montana and the University of Sydney. At the time of her passing, she was an Australian Research Council Fellow at the Australian National University. Plumwood is featured in Routledge's Fifty Key Thinkers on the Environment (2001). Throughout her academic career, Plumwood challenged the "hyperseparation" of humans from nature and critiqued the "standpoint of mastery," which reflects a dualism that subordinates the natural world, including women, indigenous peoples and non-human entities. From 1972 to 2012, she wrote and co-wrote four books and over 100 articles on topics such as logic, metaphysics, the environment, and ecofeminism. Her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993) is considered as a seminal work, while *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (2002) established her as "one of the most brilliant environmental thinkers of our time. She co-authored with her second husband, philosopher Richard Sylvan, the book, " *The Fight for the Forests* (1973). It was recognized as

the most thorough examination of Australian forestry to date. Plumwood's posthumously published work, *The Eye of the Crocodile* (2012), stemmed from her survival of a saltwater crocodile attack in 1985, which she first recounted in her essay "Being Prey" (1996). This experience provided her with a perspective of the world "from the outside," revealing a "Heraclitean universe" where she was just another source of food, in a world indifferent to her existence that would persist without her. She recalls an important incident as, "the thought, this can't be happening to me, I'm a human being. I am more than just food! Was one component of my terminal incredulity? It was shocking reduction, from a complex human being to a mere piece of meat." (Plumwood)

Indian women writers have also contributed to the development of Ecofeminism. The most prominent voice is Vandana Shiva. She is working for the environment conservation ferociously. She is primarily a physicist. She is working day and night to protect indigenous variety of seeds, agricultural sustainable practices and pollution control. She has raised her voice against genetically modified food crops and genetic engineering of seeds. She has written extensively on environment. Her texts have generated awareness among academia and general masses. Some of her notable works are *Staying Alive*, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge*, *Water Wars*, *The Violence of the Green Revolution*, *Wildness: Relations of People and Place*, *Monocultures of Mind*, *Soil not Oil* and *Stolen Harvest*. She is leading global environment movements besides this she has launched many new movements like Seed Freedom, Earth Democracy and Navdanya.

Another notable environmentalist, Bina Agarwal has focused on the aspects of material realities of environment and women. She has critiqued the male developmental model. Modern science has strengthened western patriarchy. She is a staunch opponent of western model of Ecofeminism because according to majority of Indian ecofeminist authors, it is only the third world countries that have kept the traditional agricultural practices still alive. Agarwal says these are critical arguments about the important connections between the domination and exploitation of nature and women. She also asserts that the ideology of patriarchy is such that it keeps the position of women and other non-living things below men. Western ideology has wrongly promoted the concept that women are close to nature while men are close to culture. Hence as nature is supposed to be utilized and exploited by men so is the treatment to women. Bina has basically developed an empirical, objective and policy-oriented framework of Ecofeminism. She is also a pioneer in the importance of women in green governance through their collective efforts in forest protection. Her popular works are *A Field of One's Own and Gender* and *Green Governance*. Bina suggests that environment and gender concerns should be taken together as it will help in resolving, "many long pending issues relating to development, redistribution and institutional change." (Bina) She also calls for action from, "grass root political organizations of the poor." (Omniloros)

According to Agarwal, what we need is an explicit analysis of the structural causes of environmental degradation, its effects and responses to it. She thus suggests an alternative framework which has been termed as Feminist Environmentalism. This alternative approach incorporates many elements of Ecofeminism and highlights certain issues which are missing from the Ecofeminist approach. Agarwal argues that we need to go beyond this ideological construction of gender, environment and inequality highlighted by Ecofeminism and examine the relation of women with nature more closely.

Some of the American Ecofeminists who have done notable work in this field are Carolyn Merchant and Karen Warren. Carolyn has worked on the historical roots of ecological crisis and scientific rationality. In her scholarly work, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, she has brought out the shift from a nurturing view of nature to a mechanistic worldview. She has also supported the idea that capitalism and scientific

advancements have devalued the women in the society. She gives a detailed analysis of historical understanding of nature and how it was clubbed with feminine mystery. She enumerates, “nature was contrasted with art (techne’) and with artificially created things. It was personified as a female being. Dane nature; she was alternately a prudent lady, an empress, a mother, etc. The course of nature and the laws of nature were actualization of her force.”(Carolyn xxiii) She even illustrates from ancient classical texts that how in the days of human beings in their natural state associated all the objects around as some divine objects. “The state of nature was the state of mankind prior to social organizations and prior to state of grace. Nature spirits, nature deities, nature nymphs and elements were thought to reside in or be thought to reside in or be associated with natural objects.” (Carolyn xxiii)

Karen J Warren has published the work, like *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*, and *Ecological Feminism* in which she has articulated the logic of domination that links oppression of women and nature. She is against binaries of man/woman, culture/nature in Western thought. Karen asserts that, “women are described in terms of animals as pets, cows, sows, foxens, chicks, serpents, bitches, beavers, old bats, old hens, mother hens, pussycats, cats, bird brain and hare brains..... Mother nature is raped, conquered, mastered, mined; her secrets are penetrated, her womb is to be put into the service of the man of concern.” (Karen)

Some of the women from European nations also contributed to Ecofeminism. Maria Mies of Germany has written about the ill effects of patriarchy, capitalism and subsistence economies. Her book, *The Subsistence Perspective: Beyond the Globalized Economy* has critiqued capitalist globalization and has advocated for women-led sustainable economies. Ariel Salleh on the other hand has focused on embodied materialism, ecological debt and political economy. She has written extensively on political ecology and Marxist feminism in *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx and the Postmodern* (1997).

She has exposed the capitalist’s urge to treat women, peasants and indigenous people as industrial laborers. She has talked about how nature and women are objectified, controlled and exploited by the capitalist society. Her idea of spiritual ecofeminism emphasizes on the sacredness of nature. She has advocated the idea of native pagan customs. She believes that the old traditions that worshipped nature as goddess should be popularized. Ecofeminism as an emerging discipline motivates writers and artists to become conscious of the visible effects of climate change in Europe and other geographical areas and pay attention to the tradition of feminist demands.

Katarina Leppänen (2022) shows, the quantity of cultural productions dealing with ecological disasters and dystopian and apocalyptic scenarios about the future of the planet has increased in recent years and are increasingly situated within Nordic spheres. She brings everybody’s attention to, “the fashion for Norwegian disaster films (*Troll*, *The Wake* or *The Wave*, for example), not forgetting Lars von Trier’s *Melancholia*, which associates female characters with a tragic and aestheticized representation of the future of the planet.”(<https://calenda.org/1151838?lang=en>).

She point out that these works do not portray feminist’s realities in the true sense. In Portugal, the contributions of authors like Isabel do Carmo has facilitated the examination of the social ramifications of ecofeminism concerning the relationship between women, nature and education - akin to the proposals made by Lisa Muraro in Italy - which emphasizes the notion of motherhood and its resistance to patriarchy and the capitalist model of environmental exploitation.

While European literature and culture are increasingly engaging with these ideas, it is important to note that English-language ecofeminist literature remains largely unfamiliar in France; a similar observation can be made regarding German-language ecofeminist literature,

although the 1963 novel *Die Wand (The Wall)* by Austrian author Marlen Haushofer achieved significant acclaim and serves as a model for ecofeminist narratives.

Critics from other fields do not agree with all the Ecofeminist's viewpoints. They claim that Ecofeminists look at woman as a unitary category and fails to differentiate among women by class, race, ethnicity etc. Agarwal argues that the idea that there is a different kind of relationship between women and environment that must be viewed in terms of how the third world women are the victims of environmental degradation is ignored. She criticizes the views of Vandana Shiva in *Environmental Sociology: Nature and Scope* that the examples of rural women are primarily drawn from north-west India but she generalizes all third-world women into one category. Ecofeminism largely talks about the domination of women in terms of gender and patriarchal ideologies and neglects otherwise material sources of domination which include the economic and political aspects. Ecofeminists over emphasize the ideological aspects of domination of nature and women and ignores women's material relationship with nature.

Historically, it is observed that the Western frameworks are based on the efforts to civilise, have resulted in the fragmentation of traditional meanings and identities, ultimately causing a complete disconnection from their historical foundations. The spiritual impoverishment experienced amidst the material wealth of developed nations—evidenced by high incidences of mental health disorders, substance misuse and personal violence—along with the link between spiritual deprivation and alienation from nature, remains less recognised by Western populations themselves, yet it is undeniably present. Sandra Harding and other feminist philosophers of science argue that science and technology have played a significant role in establishing and maintaining a global patriarchal dominance. The purported neutrality and objectivity of the scientific method have created an illusion of certainty and inevitability surrounding scientific and technological progress. In reality, science has largely been controlled by, and has predominantly benefited, the wealthy and the powerful. Its image as a progressive force for all humanity conceals harmful consequences such as the proliferation of destabilizing and polluting military technologies, the exploitation of natural resources, and excessive consumption.

Harding and her colleagues highlight the importance of recognising the validity of non-Western and indigenous ways of gaining knowledge. Additionally, it is essential to understand that all types of knowledge creation, including Western science, are shaped by social contexts and value systems, which allows for a more thorough analysis and critique of these practices and their results. Without such critical reflection, science and technology risk continuing to widen the gap between wealthy and poor nations, leading to increased suffering and political unrest. Ecofeminism provides a particularly insightful critique of power dynamics, rejecting hierarchical structures in favour of shared authority and promoting the idea of discovering our own inner strength rather than depending on external sources of power. Ecofeminism has provided a particularly valuable analysis of power dynamics and rejects any form of hierarchical structure. The focus is on shared empowerment, emphasising the discovery of an intrinsic 'power-from-within' rather than the imposition of control through 'power-over'.

Most variants of ecofeminism are grounded in a historical critique of ideology. According to this perspective, the oppression of both nature and women originated with a Western ideological framework known as patriarchy, which emerged approximately 5,000 years ago. Western patriarchal thought is founded on dualism, a worldview that categorises the universe into opposing pairs of concepts: mind versus body, spirit versus matter, male versus female, culture versus nature. In each pair, one concept is regarded as superior to the other. The subordinate concept is often demonised and consistently discriminated against. The ideas within these pairs are interconnected in complex relationships that serve to reinforce each other.

Groups subjected to oppression in society are frequently associated with the physical rather than the intellectual and may be characterized as intuitive yet overly emotional. This paradigm typically establishes a hierarchy of values, positioning women and nature as symbols of memory and mutilation, female anger as a source of power, and female presence as a transformative force. It encompasses ritual and science, history and imagination, invoking the voices and corporeality of the earth to restore awareness of her beauty and of our own. Within one of the many false dichotomies perpetuated by patriarchy, both exploitative rapists and the sexist ecological movement have conflated women and nature in a perspective that is detrimental to both.

Griffin, a staunch American environmentalist has assembled a diverse array of materials—including manuals on forestry, gynecology texts, pronouncements by early theologians, records of American exploration, office manuals, poetry, scientific dreams, and more—into a remarkable collage. Despite the extensive research and intellectual effort involved, this compilation becomes a profound and intense reflection on the interconnectedness of these themes.

In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Val Plumwood identified a recurring pattern of dualistic thought that pervades certain cultures and contributes to their destructive attitudes towards the natural world. Dualistic thinking involves establishing a dichotomy between two entities. Plumwood describes this form of thinking as “an alienated form of differentiation, in which power interprets and constructs difference in terms of an inferior and alien realm” (42). She further attributes the development of “logics of colonisation” to this mode of thought. Ecofeminist Karen Warren similarly assigns a central role to dualistic thinking in underpinning “oppressive conceptual frameworks” (Warren, Karen. “*The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism*.” *Environmental Ethics*, 12 (Summer 1990): 125–146).

A related critique centres on the fragmented perception of self that characterises contemporary consciousness. Ecofeminists contend that men tend to perceive the world through a dichotomy of a self-contained individual and a distinct ‘other’ representing the external environment. This perspective involves analysing the world into separate entities, with the self situated ‘in here’ and everything else ‘out there’.

“We are separate, unconnected, and the boundaries are defined by that Sacred Cow of the West, the great ‘I am’, the ego... Each of us occupies a small compartment, and most of us remain confined within our minds throughout our entire lives.”

— Adrian Harris, ‘Sacred Ecology’. This mindset reflects the idea that the natural world is merely a mechanical system subject to human exploitation. Since women are also regarded as the ‘other’, they are similarly manipulated and controlled. Ecofeminism underscores the interconnectedness of all living beings, emphasizing humanity’s role as part of the Earth’s ecosystem and advocating for a non-hierarchical system where all components influence one another, thereby challenging relationships rooted in domination and oppression.

According to Rosemary Radford Ruether, it was the development of the concepts of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ that enabled humans to diminish the significance of the former. She asserts that these concepts define nature as a reality separate from and subordinate to ‘man’, rather than recognising it as an interconnected whole in which humanity is inherently embedded. Ecofeminism calls for a profound critique of both ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ as categories, along with a reaffirmation of the marginalised partner within patriarchal dualities. Traits traditionally associated with ‘female’, such as cooperation, nurturing, supportiveness, nonviolence and sensuality, are particularly suited to propagating an environmentally conscious society. Some ecofeminists argue that conventional ‘male’ qualities like competitiveness, independence, assertiveness, leadership and intellectualism hold value in appropriate contexts and should be integrated with ‘female’ qualities to cultivate a balanced individual. The feminist critique of patriarchy extends beyond an intellectual opposition to

men; most feminists, though not all, do not consider men to be 'the enemy'. Patriarchy represents a specific mode of thinking that can be adopted by any gender and ecofeminism offers a shared platform for both sexes to address these issues.

Ecofeminists refer to what they term 'patriarchal dualism' as an ancient and widespread phenomenon. It is not confined to Western civilizations, which are often criticized for their environmental degradation. Notably, many indigenous tribal societies, frequently regarded as exemplars of ecological consciousness, hold similar notions regarding masculinity and femininity. Anthropological studies indicate that there is no direct correlation between patriarchal dualism and the social status of women. As David Maybury-Lewis observes, "a very sexist cosmology can flourish where sex roles are not hierarchical, but egalitarian and competitive" (Millennium 133). Consequently, it is plausible that some societies are environmentally respectful and do not oppress women, yet still harbour sexist cosmologies akin to Western patriarchal dualism. However, the core issue may not lie in dualism itself. It is integral to Chinese Taoist philosophy, which Peter Marshall describes as "the first and most impressive expression of libertarian ecology" (Natures Web 22). The key may be in recognizing that there are diverse ways of conceptualizing 'masculine' and 'feminine' dualities. For example, the Bara people of Madagascar associate the male principle with enduring order, symbolised by the human skeleton, and the female principle with flesh, which signifies growth, vitality, and change. As Maybury-Lewis notes, "the male principle is associated, for a change, with death, and the female with life" (Millennium, 132). Numerous goddesses embody 'masculine' qualities; an illustrative example is Morrighan, the Irish war goddess known for her bloodthirstiness and lustfulness.

Ecofeminism generally does not oppose the categorisation of humans into two distinct groups characterised by specific qualities. The primary concern lies in the manner in which patriarchy utilises dualism as a tool. Ecofeminists appear to advocate for an alternative form of dualism that recognises the value of both 'Natural' and 'Cultural' dimensions. However, questions arise regarding whether this ecofeminist dualism is excessively analytical and reductionist. Is it justified to classify the vast diversity of human existence into just two separate categories? Some feminists and ecofeminists cite the persecution of medieval witches as an example of patriarchal oppression: "The reaction against the disorder of nature symbolised by women was directed... at lower-class witches." (Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*) Nonetheless, at least 20% of those accused were men, and it appears that their persecution was perhaps more related to their status as marginal figures who did not conform to the cultural duality of the period. If this is the case, then an ecofeminist dualism could potentially be just as oppressive. Queer theory arguably provides the most substantial critique of ecofeminist dualism and, paradoxically, may offer significant insights that could advance the broader endeavour of social transformation.

Many ecofeminists posit that prior to recorded history, approximately 250,000 years ago, societies valued cooperation over competition. During this era, female deities were widely venerated and social structures were predominantly centred on women. Ecofeminists argue that there are valuable lessons to be learned from these pre-patriarchal societies. Although the majority of ecofeminists identify patriarchy as the fundamental cause of dysfunctional human behaviour, thinkers such as Chellis Glendinning suggest that humanity's disconnection from nature dates back roughly 20,000 years, coinciding with the transition from a gatherer/hunter lifestyle to the domestication of plants and animals. Other ecofeminists emphasise the ideological transformation that took place during the European Enlightenment of the 18th century. Carolyn Merchant, in her work *The Death of Nature*, describes how the organic cosmology that had historically safeguarded the environment was dismantled by the scientific and cultural upheavals of the Enlightenment. She highlights the development over the past two centuries of a scientific, technological and capitalist worldview fixated on notions of

‘progress’. Judith Plant contends that pre-industrial Western societies employed organic metaphors to interpret the self, society and nature. These metaphors functioned as ‘cultural constraints’, given that the Earth was perceived as a living entity. The scientific revolution of the Enlightenment replaced these organic metaphors with mechanical ones, leading to a view of the universe as a machine rather than a living organism, and transforming nature into a resource solely for human utilisation.

Considering the ecofeminist emphasis on non-linear, non-rational, and emotional modes of understanding, it is unsurprising that spirituality constitutes a fundamental element. Most religious traditions are regarded as patriarchal and frequently exemplify the human endeavour to transcend nature through cultural constructs. Mainstream religions often depict God as a transcendent entity, existing beyond the material world. Goddess spirituality, such as that found in Neo-Paganism as it typically affirms an imminent Deity that has exerted influence on certain branches of ecofeminism. Ecofeminist critique advocates bioregionalism as a pragmatic approach to progress. The ideas within ecofeminism have engaged significantly with Deep Ecology.

Ecofeminism is founded upon three principal premises: firstly, that the oppression of women and the domination of nature are intrinsically interconnected; secondly, that this connection arises because patriarchal dualism categorizes women and the concept of ‘Nature’ as subordinate thus assigning them lesser value compared to the classifications of ‘Culture’ and ‘Masculine’; and thirdly, that any initiative aimed at increasing ecological consciousness must also address and dismantle the oppression of women.

Many ecofeminists hold the view that patriarchy has led to the alienation of men from nature. However, it is conceivable that certain traditionally masculine approaches to engaging with the environment exist. Some Deep Ecologists, for instance, advocate for hunting—an activity historically associated with masculinity—as a means of promoting a deeper connection to nature. Although such perspectives are subject to controversy, they merit consideration within the discourse. Indigenous tribal societies often feature male hunting groups, which are believed by many to possess profound ecological wisdom. It is also noteworthy that some ecofeminists argue that the estrangement from nature originated with humanity’s transition from a gatherer-hunter existence to an agricultural society. A detached examination of Western society reveals that women are as alienated from nature as men; women participate in consumerism to the same extent and are equally influenced by dominant ideologies, whether referred to as patriarchy, capitalism or simply ‘terminal grey culture’. While ecofeminism is fundamentally non-sexist, certain adherents hold the view that men possess an ‘innately inferior capacity in areas of performance deemed significant’, as defined in *‘The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought’* (Harper Collins, 1999).

Ecofeminism appears to conflict with traditional feminism in several respects; it tends to valorize stereotypes historically regarded as oppressive and exhibits a propensity towards essentialism. The primary objective of liberal feminism is to increase the representation of women in positions of power and wealth. Conversely, some ecofeminists question the very concept of institutional power and wealth, aiming to dismantle established institutions such as government and large corporations which mainstream feminists usually seek to join. Certain ecofeminist theorists rely on an essentialist perspective that posits women as inherently more nurturing, caring and life-affirming than men. The term ‘essentialism’ carries different connotations depending on the context.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MAJOR WORKS OF ECOFEMINIST THEORISTS

Ecofeminism, as a multifaceted theoretical and activist movement, draws from various streams of feminist thought, ecological consciousness, and anti-colonial critiques. While united in their rejection of the patriarchal domination of both women and nature, ecofeminist theorists mostly differ significantly in their conceptual foundations, methods of inquiry, and visions for

ecological and gender justice. The following is the critical analysis of the major contributions of Vandana Shiva, Val Plumwood, Carolyn Merchant, Maria Mies, Greta Gaard, and Ariel Salleh. It showcases their unique scholarly standpoints and area of intellectual differences.

Shiva's work is rooted in Indian epistemology, Gandhian ecology and critiques of Western scientific rationality. In *Staying Alive*, she argues that the logic of capitalist patriarchy, expressed through monocultures, biotechnology and corporate control, mirrors the exploitation of both women and nature. She elevates indigenous knowledge systems, particularly those of rural women, as inherently sustainable and life-affirming.

Unlike Western ecofeminists who mostly emphasize philosophical dualisms, Shiva focuses on material practices in the Global South. Her celebration of "feminine principle" and spiritual connection to nature has drawn criticism for essentialism, particularly from theorists like Val Plumwood and Greta Gaard, who argue for a socially constructed understanding of gender and ecological identity. However, Shiva's work remains indispensable in understanding postcolonial ecofeminism and highlighting the embodied labor of women in subsistence economies.

Plumwood provides a rigorous philosophical critique of Western rationalism and dualism. She dissects how the logic of domination—man over woman, culture over nature, mind over body—has structured not just ecological degradation but also epistemological violence. According to Plumwood, overcoming ecological crisis requires dismantling the master identity and embracing a more dialogical and relational rationality. Plumwood is anti-essentialist and critical of ecofeminists like Shiva who risk reproducing the woman-nature link in uncritical ways. Her work is more aligned with environmental philosophy and feminist theory than with activism or indigenous politics. Her contributions provide a deep metaphysical and ethical foundation for ecofeminism and resonate with scholars seeking to deconstruct anthropocentric paradigms.

If one analyses Carolyn Merchant's contribution through, *The Death of Nature*, it appears Merchant offers a historical ecofeminist analysis of how the Scientific Revolution transformed nature from a nurturing mother into a mechanistic system to be exploited. She introduced the concept of the "organic worldview", which she sees as lost in the modern era of scientific domination. Merchant, like Plumwood, is wary of romanticizing nature but also insists on recovering pre-modern ecological sensibilities. Her analysis is largely historical and Western-centric, focusing on developments in Europe and North America. In contrast to Shiva and Mies, who critique science from the outside, Merchant critiques within the history of science, offering a more nuanced, less confrontational critique of rationalism.

Maria Mies – "*Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*" (1986), "*Ecofeminism*" (with Shiva, 1993) Mies approaches ecofeminism from a Marxist-feminist lens, arguing that capitalism rests upon the invisible, unpaid labor of women, nature, and colonies. She critiques modern development as deeply patriarchal and extractive, advocating for subsistence economies as ethical and sustainable alternatives. Mies shares common ground with Shiva in her critique of development and globalization, but adds a stronger class analysis. Unlike Gaia-centered or spiritual ecofeminists, Mies focuses on material relations and labor exploitation, aligning with socialist ecofeminism. Her insistence on radical transformation of economic systems makes her relevant to both feminist and anti-capitalist movements.

Greta Gaard – "*Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*" (1993), "*Ecofeminism Revisited*" (2011) Gaard extends ecofeminist discourse by integrating intersectionality, queer theory, and animal rights. She critiques earlier ecofeminists for being insufficiently attentive to issues of race, sexuality, and speciesism. Her work expands the scope of ecofeminism to include LGBTQ+ ecopolitics and multispecies justice. Gaard moves beyond earlier binaries by emphasizing fluid, intersectional identities. She is critical of any biological essentialism, advocating instead for a constructivist and inclusive ecofeminism. Her work pushes

ecofeminism into contemporary activist and academic spaces, making it more responsive to 21st-century crises.

Salleh introduces the concept of meta-industrial labor—the regenerative, life-sustaining labor of women, peasants, and indigenous communities that capitalism exploits but cannot replicate. She integrates Marxist ecology, feminist theory, and political economy, positioning ecofeminism as a global class struggle that is both ecological and gendered. Salleh provides a synthesis of Marxist and ecofeminist frameworks, bridging the materialist and ecological critique. Like Mies and Shiva, she emphasizes the Global South, but with more theoretical depth in terms of political economy. Her work is unique in explicitly positioning eco-socialism as the logical extension of ecofeminist politics.

The common grounds on which different ecofeminists agree are noteworthy of mentioning here—

all theorists link the oppression of women and nature to patriarchal structures. Some (e.g., Shiva, Mies) highlight material and cultural practices; others (e.g., Plumwood, Merchant) emphasize philosophical paradigms. Most reject patriarchal essentialism. Shiva and Mies have been critiqued for eco-essentialist tendencies; Plumwood and Gaard strongly oppose this. All challenge dominant Western knowledge systems. Shiva valorizes indigenous epistemologies; Merchant critiques from within; Plumwood offers philosophical alternatives. Gaard adds sexuality and species; Salleh emphasizes meta-industrial labor; Mies focuses on capitalism. Some advocate spiritual/cultural return (Shiva), others systemic revolution (Mies, Salleh) or epistemic reconstruction (Plumwood).

The richness of ecofeminist theory lies in its diverse voices and intellectual plurality. Early ecofeminists were criticized for essentialist leanings and Western biases, later scholars have expanded the field's scope to accept intersectionality, postcolonialism, queer theory and global political ecology. The conversation between these theorists—whether in harmony or tension—reveals that ecofeminism is not a static ideology but a dynamic, evolving framework that responds to ecological and social crises with critical insight, moral urgency and transformative potential.

LIMITATIONS

This research focuses on a select group of widely recognized ecofeminist thinkers such as Vandana Shiva, Val Plumwood, Carolyn Merchant, Maria Mies, Greta Gaard, and Ariel Salleh. As a result, the work may overlook the contributions of other significant but less-cited or emerging voices in the field, particularly grassroots activists, indigenous ecofeminists, and theorists from non-Western or marginalized communities whose work remains underrepresented in the mainstream literature and in online journals.

Language and Cultural Bias

The study primarily draws from works published in English, which may unintentionally reinforce a Eurocentric or Anglophone bias. Many influential ecofeminist ideas from non-English-speaking regions or oral traditions may not be fully captured, leading to a partial representation of global ecofeminist discourse.

Theoretical Emphasis Over Empirical Data

As a theoretically driven inquiry, the study does not incorporate empirical data such as interviews, case studies, or field observations. This limits its ability to assess the practical application or real-world impact of ecofeminist theories, particularly in the context of contemporary environmental movements. The research primarily engages with foundational texts from the late 20th and early 21st centuries. While some recent developments are mentioned, the study does not comprehensively account for the latest scholarship or evolving ecofeminist responses to current global crises such as climate-induced migration, digital ecologies, or post-pandemic environmental policies.

Interpretative Nature of Analysis

The comparative and critical analysis is interpretive. While care has been taken to present each theorist's work accurately and fairly, the interpretations may reflect the researcher's academic positioning.

Although ecofeminism is an inherently interdisciplinary field, this study primarily engages with philosophical, feminist and ecological frameworks. There is limited integration of perspectives from fields such as environmental science, economics, political ecology or legal studies, which could provide a more comprehensive analysis. These limitations do not undermine the value of the study but rather highlight areas for further inquiry and reflection. Future research could expand the theoretical scope, include empirical components and add more diverse voices and interdisciplinary methodologies to enrich the ecofeminist discourse.

CONCLUSION

This research paper has undertaken a critical and comparative exploration of the contributions of major ecofeminist theorists, aiming to illuminate the foundational ideas, divergences and intersections that have shaped ecofeminist thought since its emergence. By examining the works of Vandana Shiva, Val Plumwood, Carolyn Merchant, Maria Mies, Greta Gaard and Ariel Salleh, the study has revealed that ecofeminism is not a monolithic or static ideology but rather a vibrant and evolving discourse that draws from diverse epistemologies, political frameworks and cultural locations.

At the heart of ecofeminism lies a shared recognition of the interconnectedness between the domination of women and the exploitation of nature under patriarchal, capitalist and colonial systems. Yet the ways in which theorists conceptualize this linkage vary substantially. Shiva and Mies highlight the lived experiences of women, especially in the Global South, advocating for subsistence economies and indigenous knowledge systems as viable alternatives to exploitative models of development. In contrast, Plumwood and Merchant offer profound philosophical and historical critiques of dualism and mechanistic rationality, challenging the deep metaphysical roots of ecological and gendered oppression. Gaard's intersectional approach expands the boundaries of ecofeminism to include sexuality, race, and species, while Salleh's synthesis of ecofeminism and political economy introduces a systemic critique that bridges class, ecology, and gender.

Through this comparative analysis, it becomes evident that tensions within ecofeminist discourse—particularly around essentialism, epistemology, and political strategy—are not signs of fragmentation but indicators of the field's intellectual depth and adaptability. The critiques of essentialism, for instance, have propelled ecofeminism toward greater inclusivity and theoretical refinement. The incorporation of Marxist, postcolonial, and queer perspectives has broadened the scope of ecofeminism, enabling it to address the complexity of contemporary ecological crises more holistically.

Furthermore, this study underscores the importance of contextualizing ecofeminist theories within their specific historical, cultural and political settings. The ecological struggles of rural Indian women, the philosophical critique of Cartesian rationalism and the deconstruction of heteronormative environmentalism each reveal different facets of the ecofeminist response to domination and ecological collapse. Taken together, they suggest that any effective ecological movement must be grounded in both social justice and epistemic humility.

As the world faces escalating climate change, biodiversity loss, and socio-economic inequality, ecofeminist thought offers a powerful ethical and political framework that reimagines our relationship with the Earth and each other. Its emphasis on relationality, care, embodied labor and resistance to domination makes it not just a theory of critique, but a blueprint for ecological and feminist transformation.

Future research might further explore underrepresented ecofeminist voices—particularly indigenous, African, and non-Western perspectives—to decenter dominant

narratives and enrich the global dialogue. In addition to this interdisciplinary engagements with ecofeminism can link it with environmental science, ethics and education. AI can open new avenues for application of ecofeminist critique.

In conclusion, the major theorists examined in this study have laid a robust foundation for ecofeminism as both a scholarly and activist pursuit. Their diverse but intersecting visions challenge us to rethink systems of power, embrace ecological interdependence and cultivate a politics rooted in justice, sustainability and care.

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