



Combating Globalization: Ecofeminist Idea and Activism in India

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Abstract:

Popularity of the term ecofeminism in the capitalistic culture with the rise of industrialisation, smartly devised as globalization has reduced everything into a commodity. The foremost reason is technological inventions which are market oriented. This objectification of everything has unleashed a horrible order of “othering”. It has left no space for any notion of the sane and sacred in life. Bulldozers, dams, mines, energy plants, military bases – these are the temples of this new brave world. What is sacrificed at the altar of this new religion is nature’s life and people’s life. The sacraments of development are made on the ruins and desecration of other sacred, especially sacred earth and its feminine principle. Since earth is the sacred mother - the womb of life, its inviolability has been the organizing principle for the primitive societies. The sacred is the bond that connects the part to the whole. Sacred is the bond that links one to the ‘other’ since the other is also the part of the whole. But, for the modern culture, sacred bonds with the soil as well between people and communities are impediments and hindrances to be shifted and sacrificed. This paper aims to explore the contemporary culture of greed in the garb of globalization meant for the ecological and cultural rupture of bonds with nature, within society and between man and woman.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Globalisation, Marxism, Materialism.

The brave new world has opted for the transformation of organic societies into groups of uprooted and alienated individuals searching for abstract identities. This new model of progress has converted sacred mother into disposable object and woman into a body, instead of being a source of meaning. Maria Mies in her book “Ecofeminism” (a joint venture with Vandana Shiva) talks about sexist and racist implications of new reproductive technologies of 21st century:

The anti-women tendencies of the new reproductive technology are to be seen, not only in their potential for total control of women, but also in their aggressive and invasive nature.

Long ago, humans turned down the great wisdom of perceiving reality as an indivisible one. There is an inherited value system of organizing the reality according to hierarchies of power. The archetype is the power of male over female. From Confucianist China to Koranic Islam to Biblical Christianity and even the post-Vedic

India of Dvaitvad reflect and perpetuate a reality where phallic tendencies, experiences, values, symbols, inclinations and perspectives are upheld and celebrated as the norms for being a good human. Aristotle, for example, defined women as “mutilated male”. It is this ‘humanness’ which is invoked to legitimize the superiority of the men to the women and of the humans to the natural world. The ‘voice’ of the nature and the women are completely drowned in all the preferences created by the male-centric ethos.

Ecofeminism grew out of radical or cultural feminism which upholds the view that understanding the dynamics of dominance of male over female can unlock the layers of the present patriarchal culture which is men domination over nature. It can also help us in comprehending the hierarchical, militaristic, mechanistic, industrialist forms of the contemporary world which are fraught with catastrophic dimensions for the future of life on earth. Ecofeminists reject the Marxist assertion of “Dialectic Materialism” that

domination is based solely on money and class. Experiencing the inadequacies of classical dominance theory, which ignores nature as well as women, such cultural feminists were inspired by nature-based religion, usually that of the Goddess cults, that honored the female and seemed to have nature as its "Good Book". They found it intriguing to know about the sacred link of the Goddess in Her many guises with totemic animals and plants, sacred groves, womb like caves, Her voluptuous contours and fertile plains, Her flowing waters that give life, Her animals as teachers; a snake, coiled around Her arms teaching lessons of cyclic renewal and regeneration with its shedding of skins. This discovery would certainly not have been news to the Indian peoples who have completely integrated Shakta tradition in their religion and culture in which the feminine principle of existence in various manifestations is worshipped in the form of Mother Goddess. In Navratras Hindus invoke the innocent and benevolent form of Mother Shakti by feeding and worshipping the innocent maids, whereas in Ma Kali they worship Her demonic self. This culture of devi worship has inspired art, music, poetry, myth, and rituals in our part of the land for centuries together. But to the western feminists this discovery expressed the deepest feelings of a spirituality infused with ecological wisdom and wholeness which they ultimately incorporated in their new way of seeing called Ecofeminism.

This kind of awareness led many awakened Indian women into taking up the causes of environmentalism. When they became involved with Green politics for environmental reasons, they discovered ecofeminism there. Vandana Shiva, an internationally celebrated environmental activist and ecofeminist, got her first wave of inspiration from Chipko movement launched in sixties in Uttrakhand when the women of the hills enfolded the trees to stop the govt. from cutting them. The Chipko movement has gained iconic status and is now cited as a highly successful example of grassroots environmentalism in India. This movement is also key for the way in which it mobilised women. This movement introduced the concept of tree-hugging to stop activities such as deforestation, lumbering and mining. The state's increasing commercialisation and

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underdevelopment of the Garhwal region was instrumental in the conceptualisation of this movement, where local women were affected by state-level decisions such as granting private contractors harvest rights for the trees to manufacture cricket bats. Due to excessive deforestation, the year 1970 saw its most devastating flood and equally destructive landslides.

Vandana Shiva's work comes closest to cultural ecofeminism in the Indian context. Shiva asserts that 'while gender subordination and patriarchy are the oldest of oppressions, they have taken on new and more violent forms through the project of development'. She argues for the recovery of the feminine principle—Prakriti—to counter the destructive effects of the Western model of development, which she calls maldevelopment. She defines Prakriti "the feminine principle as the basis for development which conserves and is ecological. Feminism as ecology, and ecology as the revival of Prakriti - the source of all life". Shiva characterises maldevelopment as "a paradigm that sees all work that does not produce profits and capital as non- or unproductive work". Shiva convincingly argues that the violence that arises from such a model "is rooted in the patriarchal assumptions of homogeneity, domination and centralisation that underlie dominant models of thought and development strategies".

In more recent times, other women who also have led environmental causes and movements are Medha Patkar, Mahasweta Devi, Arundhati Roy and C.K Janu. Medha Patkar heads the Narmada Bachao Andolan, a social movement consisting of tribal people, adivasis, farmers, environmentalists and human rights activists against the Sardar Sarovar Dam being built across the Narmada River in Gujarat, India. Mahasweta Devi, both an activist as well as a well-known feminist writer, has dedicated much of her activism and literature to the cause of betterment of tribal people and their environment in India. Arundhati Roy, best known as the Booker Prize winner of *The God of Small Things*, wields her passionate pen for causes ranging from the Narmada Bachao Andolan, to nuclear testing in India, and to the support of the separatists' demand for aazadi (freedom) in Kashmir. The latest woman to come under spotlight for fighting

for an environmental cause is C.K Janu, as recent as the year 2003 onwards, an adivasi woman occupying the Muthanga forests in North Kerala. This was to protest the breached agreement between the adivasis and the state government to provide 500 acres of land to each adivasi family. The figure of C.K Janu as an adivasi woman leading the cause has given the movement a dimension of subaltern identity politics in addition to social justice and ecological balance.

However, the ecofeminism has also attracted a fair bit of criticism which rejects it as reductive and anti-developmental in nature. The critics claim that capitalism, progress and development do have problems, but it is not productive to use the development paradigm as a scapegoat for all of society's ills or to dismiss it completely as Shiva does. As Meera Nanda convincingly argues that the total rejection of modernity by Shiva and Mies and most post-developmentalists at times appears to be a lament against this globalization of the capitalist mode of production and indicates their desire to hold on to the local narratives in some imagined prehistoric authentic form. Furthermore, Shiva's positioning of women in India with regards to questions of ecology and development also comes across as problematical, with a tendency to homogenise and essentialise the women. In explaining the feminine principle, she says that "women in India are an intimate part of nature, both in imagination and in practice" and that by virtue of this fact, they have a privileged access to the feminine and sustaining principle. Such claims are problematic on multiple levels. Firstly, Shiva romanticizes the Third World Indian women in question here, completely obscuring the rural-urban divide between them as well as the conditions of poverty the rural women live in. Such celebratory romanticization has the effect of invisibilising the wretchedness of the conditions of their lifestyles and the work that gives Third World women their supposedly superior cooperative and ecological sensibilities. Furthermore, Shiva's overarching argument of the feminine principle Prakriti is steeped in Hindu Brahminical philosophy, thus putting forth a didactic one-dimensional religious framework opposing the mechanistic scientific viewpoint

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of the West. Her uncritical use of Hindu imagery is likened by some critics to the saffronising cultural nationalism in India where upper caste Hindu notions, symbols and metaphors are used to push for a nationalist agenda which can come across as fanatical in nature. Shiva's rigid argument also does not accommodate the effects of the developmental paradigm and environmental degradation on different groups of men in different ways. This kind of assertion of difference, however, is not very incompatible with the cultural logic of global capitalism, which can easily sell any such cultural difference as ethnic chic in order to better market commodities.

Thus, the diversity of perspectives evolving within ecofeminism lends strength to the hope that it will address not only the interlinked dynamics in patriarchal culture originating out of the terror of nature and the terror of the elemental power of the female, but also find the ways out of the mesmerizing conditioning that keeps women and men so cut off from their grounding in the natural world, so alienated from our larger sense of self in the unfolding story of the universe. Only people connected with nature on a deep level, in the moment of awakening can transform patriarchal culture into new possibilities informed by justice, wisdom, and compassion. It is extremely important to deepen our experience of communion with nature. This can be done in the mountains, at the ocean, in a city park or a backyard garden. When we are enfolded by Nature in the deep silence, we attain a higher consciousness and experience the oneness of life. At that moment the distinction between inner and outer mind dissolves, and we meet our larger self, the One Mind, the cosmic unfolding –Aham Brahma Asmi.

To care empathetically about the person, the species, and the Great Family of all beings, about the bioregion, the biosphere, and the universe is the framework within which ecofeminists wish to address the issues of our time. We need to find our way out of the technocratic alienation and nihilism surrounding us by cultivating and honoring our direct connections with nature. We all are of one fabric with all life on this glorious blue-green planet, and that we have no right to destroy the integrity of Earth's delicately balanced ecosystems, whose histories are far

longer than our own. Around us we see the immensely destructive thrashing of patriarchal leaders who cannot even name the pain and ignorance that drive their greed. Ecofeminism makes an earnest endeavour to heal these people, heal ourselves, and heal the planet. We need to lay out and organize the cultural framework for a new ecopolitics and ecoeconomics around the concrete issues of suffering and exploitation; to speak out clearly but without malice against those who further policies of injustice and ecological ignorance; to nurture the relationships with our colleagues without ill will; to use science and knowledge for cosmic well being, not for destruction. But most of all we must unlock our memories; follow the "body parables" of our sexuality; cultivate our spiritual impulses; act with pure mind and pure heart; celebrate with gratitude the wonders of life on Earth; and seek intimate communion with the natural world. This new culture, new consciousness, new beginning is the big message of Ecofeminism to the beleaguered humanity. The woman is inside each of us. We have to revive and resurrect that woman to become better human beings. One of the poems in Crow is 'Revenge Fable' There was a person Could not get rid of his mother As if he were her topmost twig. So he pounded and hacked at her With number and equations and laws Which he

invented and called truth. He investigated, incriminated And penalized her, like Tolstoy, Forbidding, screaming and condemning, Going for her with a knife, Obliterating her with disgusts Bulldozers and detergents Requisitions and central heating Rifles and whisky and bored sleep. With all her babes in her arms, in ghostly weepings, She died. His head fell off like a leaf.

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