

INTRODUCTION

The Prime objective of the thesis is to explicate and examine with critical outlook the objective of Ecofeminism. Ecofeminism is a twin concept of both ecology and feminine and as such being a forceful approach in environmental ethics deserves considerable attention to modern environmentalists. The term "Ecofeminism" was first introduced by Francoise D' Eaubonne in 1974 in a very specific sense in which the domination of nature is equated with the domination of women and vice-versa. Subsequently, this movement, in fact, has gained impetus in the recent decades in the form of innumerable protests against the burning problem of environmental devastation. The interconnectedness between women and nature has persisted throughout history and culture and any feminist theory of environmental ethics, which fails to cope with this twin subjugation of women and nature is at best incomplete and at worst simply inadequate. This kind of connection commonly made by ecological feminists between feminism and the environmental include historical, conceptual, empirical, epistemological, ethical, theoretical and socio-political. Many ecological feminists are of the opinions that a historical look at the ways in which women and other oppressed groups have been associated with the natural and the ways in which nature has been associated with the womanly in western context reveals important connections. It has been justified by saying that the historical shift in worldviews from the organic to the mechanistic was a major root for the devaluation of both women and nature. This shift actually transforms the earth centered to the sun centered world view. Earth is associated with the aspects of womanliness, and sun centered view has just replaced a woman centered one as the sun has been traditionally associated with manliness. This is aptly reflected in the remark of Copernicus who once said, 'the earth gets conceived by the sun and becomes pregnant with animal

offsprings.' Ecofeminists are of the opinion that oppression and exploitation of women prevails in patriarchal society which is very much similar to the domination and exploitation of nature by men and just the domination of women by men is detrimental to the society, at least morally, likewise the domination of nature is detrimental to the whole biotic community. Thus understanding ecofeminism helps one to comprehend the value, dignity and basic necessities of all forms of life within the biotic community.

Value dualism and the logic of domination:

Ecofeminism has originated as a revolt against value dualism. A value dualism is a disjunctive pair in which the disjuncts are seen as oppositional and exclusive and in which one form of value enjoys a higher degree than the other. Many ecological feminists conceive that a reason- nature dualism underlies the conceptual framework of western patriarchal cultures. This basic form of dualism is thought to form the basis for a series of related dualism in which whatever is associated with reason is viewed as fundamentally different and superior to. The dualised pairs involve not only reason / nature and masculine/ feminine, but also mental/ manual, civilized/ primitive, and also human/ nature. These pairs function to legitimate a number of oppressions, including sex, race and class oppression, which can all be seen in terms of the central dualism underlying the system. According to Pulmwood, the construction of dualised identities involves five features: these are (i) backgrounding, (ii) radical exclusion, (iii) incorporation (iv) instrumentalism and (v) homogenization. All these things lead to a typical form of argument which may be called in brief: the logic of domination. According to ecofeminists, this dualistic propensity justifies the domination of women (nature) by men on the basis of the following logical arguments:

(A₁) Humans do, plants do not, have the capacity to consciously change the community in which they live.

(A₂) Whatever has this capacity is morally superior to whatever does not have it.

(A₃) Humans are morally superior to plants and rocks.

(A₄) For any x and y, if x is morally superior to y, then x is morally justified in subordinating plants and rocks.

Since women are identified with nature, the same logic of domination of women by men can be stated below :

(B₁) Women are identified with nature and the realm of the physical; men are identified with humans and the realm of the mental.

(B₂) Whatever is identified with nature and the realm of the physical is inferior to (below) whatever is identified with the human and the realm of the mental.

(B₃) Thus, women are inferior to men.

(B₄) For any x and y, if x is superior to y, then x is justified in subordinating y.

(B₅) Men are justified in subordinating women.

It has been claimed by many ecofeminists that domination of nature by humans and the sexist domination of women by men are based on the same general framework. Accordingly, the devaluation of women depends on prior devaluation of nature. They are conceptually linked with each other. If we think that there underlies a conceptual link between the domination of nature as well as the domination of women, then it follows that a movement that is not feminist will yield at best a superficial understanding of the domination of nature. It has also been held that in order to save the environment, one ought to

be working to overthrow patriarchy, the root of domination, and those working to bring down patriarchy should be fighting to save the environment. At a conceptual level these fights are two sides of the same coin. The logic of domination, therefore, underlies not only sexism and naturism, but racism and all other isms as well. The objective of ecofeminism, therefore, is to end all of these isms, which are linked to the logic of domination.

It is further noted that any form of scientific and technological development or upliftment actually devalues both women as well as nature. Here scientific and technological developments are predominantly male development. This point has been distinctly raised by eminent ecofeminist Vandana shiva in her celebrated book *Staying Alive*. She goes on to say that the so called development, which is actually meant male development, has been highly problematic for those who have been developed. She holds that it is often women who have the most to lose as such kind of development actually destroys sustainable lifestyle and thereby creates true material poverty for those who are developed. Resources needed for the purpose of sustenance are diverted for use in the production of cash crops and other commodities to be sold on the market. According to western models, people living in subsistence economies are seen as poor because they do not produce surplus to be bought and sold on the global market. By standards of western development, these people are poor by definition. One of Shiva's central points is that attempts to remove culturally perceived poverty often create real material poverty; the quality of life of those who are developed is often higher before male development occurs. Shiva, therefore, argues that the devaluation of women and nature is the outcome of western style patriarchy, which is imported through the development projects. To quote Shiva, "The myth of the cognitive superiority and success of a modern reductionist patriarchal science of death is

founded on this illegitimate translation of violence as a sign of effectiveness. The strategy of overkill breeds pest outbreaks; it does not regulate or control them. Why does the myth that modern science controls nature persist, when it actually creates a nature that is completely out of control? Violence is not an indicator of control; its use is a sign that the system is becoming uncontrollable.”¹ The patriarchal nature of values, in which the value is interpreted instrumentally which are part of the western model means development is often worse for women than it is for man because it overrates scientific knowledge as the only true knowledge and thereby undermines women and their traditional practices. Shiva, however, in her book has shown how modern scientific techniques are largely held to be successful in destroying sustainable life style. Thus Shiva and other leading ecofeminists are of the opinions that in order to overcome the so-called ecological crisis, we have to regenerate values which have been devalued in patriarchal society. This can be done only by recognizing the value of women’s experiences which patriarchal societies fail to do. We have to celebrate such things as femininity and feminine values as an immediate social basis for alternative consciousness which the deep ecologist is trying to formulate and introduce as an abstract ethical construct. This recalls Salleh’s remark who says, “Women are beings who can feel and realise from the inside out what is like to weave the earth into a new human being.”² There is some truth in the idea that the earth is a birthing process, but this truth can only be seen, in fact, effortlessly intuited by women, as woman is a being who can give birth.

Thus ecofeminists vehemently oppose any form of domination and subjugation of women and nature by men. For them oppression in any form is wrong as it

¹ Shiva, V. *Staying Alive*, Kali for India, New Delhi, 1989, P-158.

² Salleh, A.K, “*Deeper than deep ecology: The ecofeminist connection*” in *Environmental Ethics*, Vol-6 , P-340.

causes damages to these who suffer it. Shiva argues that development causes women's work to be seen as less valuable. Ecofeminists try to admit some essential attributes as shared by women and nature. In discussing the category women it is assumed that individual women of different racial, class and cultural identities into the category unproblematically attribute and therefore they share some essential attributes. The category of nature is also dealt with as if it is static, real, metaphysically given and unproblematic. Thus some ecological feminist positions seem to use essentialist notions of women and nature. When it is claimed that women are closer to nature, it is meant to say that there underlies some essence possessed by women for which the close connection between women and nature is established. One cannot examine links between oppressions of women and nature if one cannot even refer to those essential categories.

Another important aspect of ecofeminism is that it criticizes main stream approaches to environmental philosophy, and as such it refers to and holds responsible some already established philosophies. It holds that the root of all anomalies leading to environmental degradation, in fact, lies in the developments during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Descartes' statement 'Cogito Ergo Sum' (I exist because I think) provided the philosophical foundation of the mechanistic worldview of universe. There followed many developments in the world of science and humanities. Also, a worldview which basically emanated from Francis Bacon's advocacy of torturing nature to reveal her secrets, justified the indiscriminate exploitation of nature and her resources. Any socio-philosophical concept based on such philosophy would tend to be exploitative and oppressive. Karl Marx tried to offer an alternative system, which promised to abolish the exploitation of the working classes by the capitalists. As a nineteenth century thinker, Marx was also influenced by the success of the mechanistic world-view. Scientific

rationalism thus continues to be an important ingredient of Marxist philosophy and as such Marx also accepts the conquest and exploitation of nature caring little for her intrinsic values.

It would be worthwhile to note that John Locke – the celebrated philosopher of his times developed a philosophy of natural laws and social behaviours. His philosophy was a step towards the essence of nature and its holism.

The Cartesian – Newtonian reductionist approach or mechanistic worldview – the basic concept that it was possible to have unlimited growth on a limited planet was itself unsustainable. Therefore, it is not the mismanagement of nature but the worldview behind it that is responsible for the discrimination in the treatment of the parts of nature. Hence, according to mainstream approach, environmental protections should be measured on the basis of instrumental values, and the relevance of intrinsic value, if anybody seeks, can only be found in the case of nonhuman entities. Instrumental value, of course, demonstrates the importance of environmental health and integrity for human flourishing. Ecological feminists, however, rule out such proposal, as it would invite natural and cultural dualisms within the domain of biotic community. Here we can particularly mention the name of Singer who establishes himself as an extensionist by extending traditional ethical theories to nonhuman beings. However, some ecological feminists differ from Singer. Singer appears to conceive that atomistic human individuals are the paradigm example of beings with moral value and then argues that at least some animals possess the qualities, which account for individual human moral value. Ecological feminists, on the contrary, argue for the extension of moral value to include non-humans.

The criticism of mainstream approach has further been criticized with the introduction of deep and social ecology. Deep ecology is a movement founded by Norwegian Philosopher Arne Naess which is based on the principles of

biocentric equalitarianism and self-realization. Biocentric equality is the principle that all things in nature have equal value, and is thus supposed to be radically non-anthropocentric. Self-realization, seeing oneself as part of a larger whole as opposed to a radically separate and egoistic being, is said to challenge dualistic thinking and our deepest assumptions of what is to be human. According to Naess, we can reach higher levels of being through a process of deep questioning, a kind of spiritual journey ending in an ecologically conscious self. Thus, biocentric equalitarianism and self-realization are the two basic principles of deep ecology. Hence, the ontological shift for an ecologically sustainable future has much to gain from the world-views of ancient civilizations and diverse cultures which survived sustainably over centuries. These were based on an ontology of the feminine as the living principle, an ontological continuity between society and nature-the humanization of nature and the naturalization of society which resulted in an ethical context which excluded possibilities of exploitation and domination and as such allowed the creation of an earth family.

For an alternative worldview a new paradigm has to be evolved. 'I' here and 'you' there is no longer valid. The concept of participatory universe has to be thought of and encouraged. Reductionist approach is now being replaced by an integral approach. The holistic worldview offers a new paradigm shift building a philosophy free from discrimination in all spheres of life. It demands attitudinal changes with regard to the relationship between human society and the eco-system.

Keeping in view of the nature of holism and a better eco friendly paradigm 'ecofeminism', a curial area in environmental ethics has been proposed to be taken up for research work. There would be an examination how the domination of women and the domination of nature are closely linked.

Ecofeminists seem to decipher the link without which environmental philosophy will both theoretically and practically be partial. We have to examine in what sense ecofeminists perception that the link between ecology and women may be historical, conceptual, empirical, epistemological, ethical, theoretical and socio-political. As it has already been stated that the historical transition in world-view from the organic to mechanistic was major root for the devaluation of both women and nature, ecofeminists try to discover how the claims in mechanistic means society justifies the logic of domination of women and nature by anthropocentric and patriarchal approach of society. Ecofeminists claim that sexist domination of women by men has to be discussed and examined. As the devaluation of women depends on prior devaluation of nature, they are conceptually linked with each other. An examination would be made to find out the link and its justification. Also, the logic of domination underlies not only sexism and naturism but other isms also. The objective of ecofeminism is to end all these isms. Attempts should be made to see the points how culturally perceived poverty often create material poverty. Criticism of mainstream approaches to environment would also be made in the work undertaken.

Ecofeminism and Deep ecology, both are philosophical movements arising out of degradation of nature. Though they offer different accounts concerning nature, they have closeness to a great extent so far the object is concerned. The instruments of Ecocentrism and Non-anthropocentrism have been taken up by both Ecofeminists and Deep Ecologists to meet their goals and as such they would be discussed together. The objective would be to establish the view that Deep Ecology and Ecofeminism are complementary to each other. We propose to examine such issues in **Chapter One** and it would be entitled as “Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology”.

Like Ecofeminism, Social Ecology also deals with Ecological and Environmental issues. Though there are considerable differences between Social Ecology and Ecofeminism, they share a lot of significant similarities, which would be employed in the work proposed. Ecofemism involves diverse feminist philosophies in the analysis of ecological issues. Since Ecofeminism is attached with feminist issues and feminist philosophy involves many different social outlooks, Social Ecology and Ecofeminism must have homogeneity. This proposed work will be an attempt to address all these and would be discussed in the **Chapter Two**. It would be entitled as “Eco-feminism and Social Ecology”.

Understanding Ecofeminism means understanding the value of nature. Ecofeminism not only finds out the parity of domination between women and nature, it also explores various ways and means through which such type of domination can be regarded as morally unjust. By making comparison between men and nature, Ecofeminism tries to restore the dignity of nature in moral context. Ecofeminism is largely about ethics, norms and values, which will support the wellbeing of the whole biotic community. This would be discussed in **Chapter Three** and it would be entitled as “Eco-feminism and the Value of Nature”.

Mainstream ethics, which is the outcome of technology, always attempts to extend a firm moral boundary between humans and nature. But this is fallacious and dangerous in the eye of Environmental Ethics. The dualism and moral hierarchies between humans and nature should go. Ecofeminism is an answer to this. Attributing the value to nature Ecofeminism rejects speciesism, the unjustified belief that human being is superior to any other form of life. Thus, Ecofeminism and value of Nature would be dealt in length from different angles.

In the currents of the history of Philosophy feminism has raised its head as a protest or philosophy against patriarchal institutions and designs. The malecentric developments have caused detriment to the other side of humanity and as such the women section throughout history has been being denied their dues. For that their protests and perspectives have been different though mostly they have shown akinness. Hence, feminism in its different waves would be discussed and examined at some length with reference to philosophy or philosophies already established.

The Bodo women of Assam are found to have suffered from malecentric concept of dain (witch) as such many innocent lives have been tortured and killed. This particular community or communities are marginalized on flimsy grounds of dream medicines or supernatural evil powers. The problem being a feminist one, some concepts that have reference to patriarchy and value dualism must be working. Hence dainism as an offshoot of patriarchy would be looked into.

Justice is one of the important domains of moral philosophy, as such for centuries philosophers have made their enquiry into to build it upon a solid foundation. The celebrated philosophers in Plato, Aristotle, and Rawls have established their theories on solid foundation. Ecofeminism is a philosophy that protests against the twin domination of nature and women. Justice to women as well as nature has been denied this or that way. Hence, justice to these so called passive categories has to be examined under the celebrated theories of justice by Plato, Aristotle and Rawls, and for that the link between ecofeminism and theories of justice will be focused and brought back. All these issues would be discussed in **Chapter Four** and it would be entailed as “Feminism, Dainism, Justice and Eco-feminism”.

In the **Conclusion Chapter** an attempt would be made to give general assessment and critical outlook of the philosophical implications of ecofeminism in our rationale and perspectives. Philosophy being an interpretation of the life and the world has to react to the environmental degradation and give a proper path to the society at large. In this respect a study and research work on 'Ecofeminism' may cater to the need of the time.

