

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Ecofeminism

#### **Introductory:**

'Ecofeminism'- a very specific term used by D' Eaubonne in 1974 reconceives feminist principles and tries to construct an environmental ethics by taking into account possible connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature. All ecofeminists, however, agree that there underlies a close link between the domination of women and the domination of nature, and one can gain a clear understanding of one by acquiring knowledge about the other. This movement, in fact, gained impetus in the recent decades in the form of innumerable protests against the burning problem of environmental degradation. According to the ecofeminists' view an environmental philosophy which fails to attend to or inculcate the possible connection between the subjugation of women and nature is undoubtedly deficient and incomplete. The interconnectedness between women and nature can be traced backed to the historical past and the shift in the world view from the organic to the mechanistic was the root cause for the degradation of both.

According to the Samkhya system of Indian philosophy, Prakrti or Nature has got certain characteristics that are common to woman-in-general. Just as woman can make a person happy, unhappy or infatuated with her three qualities-satta, rajas, and tamas; Prakrti is also having such characteristics of happiness, misery and infatuation due to having same quality. Moreover, both are reproductive (prasavatmika) and creative in nature.

According to prominent ecofeminists, exploitation and subjugation of women prevailing in the patriarchal society is very much associated with the domination and massive exploitation of nature by human

beings. Just as the domination of women by men is detrimental to the society, at least morally, similarly the exploitation and domination of nature by man is detrimental to the whole biotic community. Thus understanding ecofeminism, i.e. the interconnection between women and nature helps one to comprehend the value, dignity and the basic necessities of all forms of life within the biotic community. Ecofeminism, a feminine movement which strives to rule out the twin domination and exploitation of women and nature helps one to develop a caring, loving and sympathetic attitude towards all life forms, thus, cultivating the ground for peaceful <sup>34</sup>mutual co-existence of man with nature and women.

### **Feminist ethics and Ecofeminism:**

Feminism or feminist movement, however, is a totalitarian or mass movement undertaken by women of all sects to bring an end to all forms of feminist oppression by men prevailing in a patriarchal society. Amongst all forms of domination, sexist oppression- which is morally unacceptable in all its forms – is vehemently protested by all feminist groups. The feminist aims to terminate or obstruct all forms of male domination and thereby remake the living planet, which according to them is in the danger of dying. The chief motto of all feminists is to “..... snatch the car’s steering wheel from the hands of the male society .....”<sup>35</sup>

Searching for firewood, caying water and providing minimum sustenance for the family constitute a women’s primary responsibility and due to her participation in the above mentioned activities, she fails to take part in the so called cream activities like decision making and income generation. The egoist man engages himself in these activities and thereby occupies a high status or position within the family and consequently within the society, thereby making it a male

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<sup>35</sup> Francoise D’Eaubonne, Translated by Ruth Hattell “ The Time of Ecofeminism” included in *Key Concepts in Critical Theory Ecology*, edited by Carolyn Merchant , Rawat Publication, Jaipur and New Delhi, 1996, p.174.

dominated one. In fact most of the feminist issues depend largely on the above mentioned historical and material condition of women's life. The two immediate problems imperiling mankind and the root causes of environmental degradation are – over population and consequent destruction and over exploitation of earth's natural resources – the outcome of male hierarchy or patriarchy and domination. Man's power to reproduce and his ability to sow the earth are the prime factors behind this menace.

Fifty centuries ago women enjoyed monopoly in agriculture and men believed that women were impregnated by God. But with the discovery of his dual power- i.e., agricultural and procreational- man seized control of the soil (fertility) and women's womb (fecundity). In fact the overexploitation of the two by men has resulted in overpopulation and consequent destruction and degradation of the environment. The wisest solution to this grave problem according to the feminists is the destruction of the male power by women in the form of mass totalitarian movement.

The above paragraphs clearly indicate that over exploitation of nature and thereby deterioration of environment are somewhat feminist issues and a proper understanding of the aforesaid issue paves the way for a better understanding of female oppression in a male dominated society. Urbanization, industrialization, commercialization of agriculture, massive deforestation- all leading to environmental degradation are reflection of advancement of science and technology which deprive women from their original right. Rampant felling of trees for commercialization of agriculture in the form of cultivation of monoculture species has led to destruction of virgin forest areas, thereby destabilizing women's ability to maintain a subsistence household. The scientific and technological advancement in fact "destroyed women's productivity by removing land, water and forests from their management and control, as well as through the ecological

destruction of soil, water and vegetation systems so that nature's productivity and renewability were impaired."<sup>36</sup>

Many of the ecological disasters, like the leakage of methyl isocyanides gas from the Union Carbide Pesticides plant in Bhopal on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1984 and the consequent death of around 3000 people provoked the female force to protest against the disastrous consequences of the so called advancement of science and technology undertaken by the masculine force. According to the feminists, it was a war against nature and therefore against women. Today's women have realized that the recent developments in biotechnology, genetic engineering and reproductive technology whose paradigms are essentially patriarchal are all against the reproductive and regenerative capacities of nature and women in particular. Degradation of the environment which is equalized with subjugation, devaluation and demoralization of women is thus the outcome of patriarchy or masculine domination of the society at large. In this connection Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva quotes -"We see the devastation of the earth and her beings by the corporate warriors, and the threat of nuclear annihilation by the military warriors as feminist concerns. It is the same masculine mentality which would deny us our right to our own bodies and to our own sexuality and which depends on multiple systems of dominance and state power to have its way."<sup>37</sup>

### **Logical foundation of female domination:**

The feminist issues discussed so far are very much related to ecological issues. The domination of feminine by masculine and its parallelism to nature is an age long historical fact grounded in logic. All feminist issues therefore are conceptual. Hence feminist revolution including its extension to ecofeminism is a protest against the logic of domination and value dualism forming the basis of the conceptual

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<sup>36</sup> Shiva, Vandana. : "Women, Ecology and Development" in *Staying Alive*, London: Zed Books Ltd, 1988, p.172.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. , p.498.

framework. The meaning of the term 'conceptual framework' needs to be clarified at the very outset. The term denotes "a set of basic beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions which shape and reflect how one views oneself and one's world. It is a socially constructed lens through which we perceive ourselves and others."<sup>38</sup>

The oppressive and patriarchal are the two classifications of conceptual framework. The former explains and justifies the logic of domination amongst the different species of the biotic community. The later justifies and maintains subjugation of feminine by masculine. Both forms of domination are basic concerns of environmental philosophy and environmental ethics as both are detrimental to the society and environmental at large.

The three basic features or characteristics of oppressive conceptual framework are as follows:

- (i) Value hierarchical thinking: Within the biotic community some species are conferred higher value and placed at a higher status or position than the others. Human beings, for example, enjoy higher value, status and prestige amongst all species of the natural world or in other words they are at the top of the hierarchy. Accordingly, human beings are morally allowed to oppress or subjugate all other species of the biotic world.
- (ii) Value dualism: Value dualism admits disjunctive pairs within the biotic community. The disjuncts are oppositional and exclusive rather than complementary and inclusive. One disjunct possesses higher value and therefore enjoys superiority over the other. 'Male' and 'female' are the disjunctive pairs within the community of human beings. Value dualism bestows or confers higher value to male identified with 'mind' and 'reason' than to female paralleled to 'body' and 'emotion'. In fact, 'ecofeminism' as a movement

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<sup>38</sup> Warren, J. Karren. : 'The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism' in *Environmental Ethics*, Vol.12, No.2, summer 1990, quoted from *The Environmental Ethics and Policy Book* by Donald Vandaveer and Christine Pierce, North Carolina State University, 2003, p.283.

originated as a revolt against the concept of value dualism. Many ecological feminist conceive that a reason/ nature dualism persist within the conceptual framework of western cultures. The dualised pairs include not only reason/nature, masculine/feminine, mental/manual, mind/body, civilized/primitive and many others. The existence of these disjunctive pairs makes different forms of oppression like sexual, racial, class etc. very much legitimate. All these lead to a typical form of argument, i.e. the logic of domination which is the third basic characteristic of the oppressive conceptual framework.

- (iii) Logic of domination: The logic of domination justifies and legitimizes subordination and subjugation. Justification of domination is based on some alleged characteristics possessed by certain species of the biotic or natural world. As for example, within the class of human beings, 'rationality' forms the specific or alleged characteristic of the masculine mass which empowers them to dominate over the feminine lacking these characteristic, and such domination or oppression is absolutely justified.

The chief arguments justifying the logic of domination may be stated in the following manner:

- (A1) Humans do, plants do not, possess the capacity to consciously transform the community in which they reside.
- (A2) Whoever possesses the capacity to transform is superior to whoever lacks it.
- (A3) Hence, human beings are morally superior to non-human nature like plants and rocks.
- (A4) Therefore, for any x and y, if x is morally superior to y, then x is morally justified in subordinating or dominating y.
- (A5) Human subordination of non-human nature like plants and rocks is, therefore, morally justified.

Argument (A4) is very much relevant to the ecofeminist's discussion of oppression of feminine and nature. Since women are identified with nature, the same logic of domination of women by men can be stated in the following manner.

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

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

(B3) Thus, women are inferior to men or conversely men are superior to women.

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

(B5) Thus, men are justified in subordinating women.

The above argument B is truly patriarchal in nature as it admits and justifies systematic subordination of women by men. All the three features of oppressive conceptual framework are embedded within argument B. Though both arguments A and B, i.e. oppressive and patriarchal conceptual framework have functioned historically, all feminists including ecofeminists agree that both arguments ought to be rejected.

From the above stated argument it seems to be clear that domination of nature by human and subjugation of women by men have the same conceptual base. Ecofeminists therefore bear the opinion that devaluation of women is actually rooted in devaluation of nature. If we accept a conceptual link between domination of women and domination of nature, then it follows that a movement that is not feminist will yield at best a superficial understanding of the domination of nature and consequent environmental degradation. It is a well established fact that the primary deterioration of environment is domination of nature by humans. Thus, one possibly way to safeguard our environment, or in a broad sense nature as a whole, is to

overthrow or uproot the conceptual base of domination, i.e. patriarchy. This seems to be the prime task of the ecofeminists. Or in other words, it may be stated that an ecofeminist endeavors to protect the environment by uprooting patriarchy.

### **Maldevelopment in the name of development: A deep concern for ecofeminists:**

Scientific and technological development promoting capital accumulation, commercialization of economy, creation of surplus and profits actually brings about devaluation of nature as well as women. Such development schemes and process displace people living sustainably, create poverty, induce destruction to the environment and crumble the regenerative capacity of the environment. An amicable solution to the global crisis of environmental degradation is through revival and recovery of the feminist principle which advocates an attitude of care and revival of spirituality. The notion of development is, in fact, based on exploitation and exclusion of women and degradation of nature and erosion of other creatures. Thus, ecofeminists are greatly concerned about development, not only for the fact that women take inadequate and insufficient participation in development programmes, but because of the fact that they bear the costs without deserving the benefits.

In this connection, Vandana Shiva, a celebrated ecofeminist, in her book '*Staying Alive*' goes on to say that material development, which in actuality or reality is maldevelopment destroys sustainable lifestyles, displaces women from their feminine job and thereby create true material poverty. Natural resources required for the purpose of sustenance are chiefly utilized for commercial benefits, i.e. for earning profit. The most vital point in commercialization of economy is production of surplus and earning of profit. Hence, people living in subsistence economies are seen as poor, because they do not produce surplus, nor do they gain any profit. By standard of western

developments, these people are poor by definition. Commercialization of agriculture crushed women's productivity on one hand by taking away land, water and soil from their management, and on the other, nature's productivity and regenerative capacity were impaired through over use and destruction of soil, water and vegetation system. Shiva blames patriarchal culture imported through development projects responsible for devaluation of both women and nature. In a patriarchal society nature is valued instrumentally and the different projects undertaken for economic, development through modern scientific techniques undermines women and their traditional practices by destroying sustainable lifestyles. Most ecofeminists, including Shiva, therefore remarks that in order to tackle ecological crisis, it is necessary to regenerate or revive values devalued in a patriarchal society. Revival of nature's value can come through revival of the feminine principle, i.e. to value or celebrate women's activity or experience. A woman capable of bearing and breeding a child with love, care, and affection brings new life into the earth. She is a symbol of love and affection and through the revival of these principles or feminine characteristics, by living in harmony and co-operation with nature instead of over exploiting it, the grave ecological crisis which the world is facing today can gradually be tackled.

Ecofeminists,, therefore vehemently rejects domination of women and nature by men. They try to admit some essential attribute as shared by women and nature. Both women and nature are categorized as static, real, metaphysical and unproblematic. When it is claimed that women are closer to nature, it means that there underlies some essence possessed by women which establishes the close link between women and nature.

### **Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology:**

Since ecofeminism is a twin concept of both ecology and feminism, one cannot rule out the assimilation of ecofeminism and deep ecology. It is important to note here that the movement of Deep Ecology

actually takes an extremely holistic view of nature in which individual self merges with ecocosms. In this regard we find a close proximity between ecofeminism and deep ecology. Like ecofeminism, deep ecology is a philosophical movement which aims to present a critique of dominant world view and thereby proposes an alternative message. "The message of deep ecology" Fox says, "is that we ought to care as deeply and as compassionately possible about the fate-not because it affects us but because it is us."<sup>39</sup> Deep ecology, thus, desires for an integral or organic whole of the biotic community.

It is important to note here that although the objective of deep ecology and ecofeminism are somehow or other coherent as both stands against mainstream view, but there underlies a certain distinction in the approaches of ecofeminism and deep ecology. According to ecofeminists, although every species within the biotic community is related to each other, they are distinct from each other. Since they are distinct from each other, ecofeminists suggest that one ought to respect the individuality of these beings rather than seeking to merge with them. Therefore, our mode by relating to them should be via open-minded and alternative encounter, rather than through abstract metaphysical pre-conceptualization as suggested by deep ecologists. Unlike ecofeminists, deep ecological movement is directed towards an integral relation of all species of the biotic world where self-identity of each species is ignored.. Thus one can conceive a theoretical conflict between ecofeminism and deep ecology, because deep ecological movement is directed towards metaphysical pre-conceptualization where individual self merges with ecocosms and ecofeminism is based on kinship and care of each species of the whole biotic community. Deep ecological movement hinges on the slogan: 'nature knows best'. On the contrary, ecofeminism is directed towards the interconnectedness thesis based on self-realization, mutual trust, care and respect towards others. Unlike deep ecological movement

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<sup>39</sup> Warwick, Fox. : "Deep Ecology: A New Philosophy of our Time" included in *Environmental Ethics*, edited by Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston 111, Blackwell 2003, p.258.

ecofeminism does not identify us directly with nature as a whole, that is to say ecofeminism does not make us identify ourselves with monolithic nature. According to the ecofeminists, nature 'is the product of a re-awakening or revival of our kinship with our individual non-human realities. It is very much familiarized with our individuality rather than any kind of our cosmic identification. It actually emerges out of a sense of solidarity with our fellow beings.

Does it make sense to say that ecofeminism is contrary to deep ecology? On the basis of the above consideration it can be said that the objective of ecofeminism is somehow or other different from deep ecology, as ecofeminism is directed towards care and kinship and deep ecological movement is directed towards identification of nature as a whole. Having said this, one would still like to say that both ecofeminism and deep ecology are the two important wings of environmental ethics. Both ecofeminism and deep ecology form an important part of our metaphysical and ethical relationship with nature- with their complementary interpretation of the interconnectedness thesis. If reality is based on internal connections as suggested by deep ecologists, and again if reality consists of a web of relations as suggested by ecofeminists, then it may be seen as both a whole and as a manifold of individuals. Accordingly, reality appears to qualify as a moral order. Any attempt to relate human beings with nature, both historically as well as individually need to be taken into account. This attempt leads us at the end to an irreducible moral conflict (ambivalence) consisting of compassionate intervention on behalf of nature on one hand and natural tide of destruction on the other. We have no option but to accept moral conflict and thereby try to discover that it is our humanity that compels us to act on behalf of our embattled fellow creatures. In this regard the moral standard of deep ecology is brought down to the ground. On the contrary to discover that our compassion, the value taken for granted by ecofeminism, is not beyond moral. Moral compassion always comes down to our love for the familiar, our solidarity with the natural things

that are associated with us. Ecofeminism in this regard diverts from its root. Thus, the relationship between ecofeminism and deep ecology can be visualized with the slogan: Ecofeminism humanizes deep ecology and deep ecology does indeed deepen ecofeminism.

On the basis of the above slogan we can say that our grounds for ecological resistance for environmental degradation in general actually hinges on our humanity, love, care and most importantly realization for our fellow beings- an ethical commitment which is underlying in one sense or other both in ecofeminism and deep ecology. In fact, whatever we wish to endorse, either in holistic or individualistic way, we have to give up the dualistic thinking prevailing in mainstream ethics, between human beings and nature. We have to realize the true affirmation of life, i.e. the meaning of life can not be conceived without foregoing the so-called dualism prevailing in first order life. Anticipating the view that our humanity is the well spring, not only of consuming destructiveness but also of the previous compassion which encounters it, one may say that it will help to lead us out of the moral deed lock of the divorce between humanity and nature.

## **Ecofeminism and its Connection to Social Ecology:**

Both ecofeminism and social ecology deal with environmental and social issues. Although there are considerable discrepancies between ecofeminism and social issues, both share common views which make it appropriate to discuss them in this chapter. The analytical aspect of both social ecology and ecofeminism analyses the causes and issues underlying the contemporary ontological crisis. Moreover, both the fields have programmatic aspects that offer alternative versions of an ecologically sound future. Both share the view that environmental degradation and ecological problems are related to social problems of control and dominance. However, their explanations and analysis concerning social problems and their programs for social change

differ. That human centredness or egoistic attitude is the major cause behind ecological crisis, although focused by proponents of Deep Ecology, is vehemently rejected or denied by ecofeminists and deep ecologists. They are of the opinion that the root of our ecological crisis hinges on certain social factors. Both bear the opinion that subjugation of nature and its eventual deterioration arise from social patterns of domination and hierarchy, patterns of social life in which some humans exercise domination and subjugation over other species of the biotic community or even on humans as such. From the above observation it seems to be clear that both the approaches have tried to shift attention of philosophy towards social and political philosophy instead of metaphysics and ethics. They hold that traditional theories of social justice can be utilized in analyzing and solving environmental problems. Therefore, the primary task of these views is to analyze the relationship between man and the social organization or society by large in which he resides. In this context the question that needs to be answered is-how a society is created and for what purpose is it created? A society is, in fact, an organization created by human beings themselves for fulfilling or satisfying their ends. Thus, when environmental degradation is seen as a social problem or when it is said that the present global crisis is the outcome of social structures of dominance and control, we should enquire about the ends generated by the particular institution causing the problem.

What do the societies in general do or do to people? Who is benefiting from and who or which section of the people is harmed by various social practices? Such pertinent questions demand proper answers for solution of ecological problems cropping up from social practices and prejudices. Both ecofeminists and social ecologists are conscious about the existence of different social organizations and structures responsible for their oppressive or dominating attitudes towards a section of the society for the benefit of another section of the same society. Such social structures are referred to as 'oppressive' social structures' which indulge or encourage the domination and

subjugation of life forms including the domination of the species of the biotic community. Bookchin, a renowned social ecologist, narrates this point by saying, "The very notion of domination of nature by men stems from the very real domination of human by human."<sup>40</sup> Radford Reuther expresses a similar view as he says, "Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socio-economic relations and the underlying values of the society."<sup>41</sup> This view of Reuther brings into focus that the social dominance of the female population, i.e. a section of human population, which is at par with the domination of nature is responsible for ecological destruction and such a form of destruction can be tackled by mass movement of women against the so-called domination. The prime task of ecofeminists and social ecologists is to identify and analyze patterns of domination and oppression within different societies and evaluate these problems in terms of philosophical accounts of justice in which all species of the biotic communities are free from oppression and domination. Here lies the relevance of environmental justice.

## **The relevance of Environment Justice in Social Ecology and Ecofeminism:**

Although similarities exist between social ecology and ecofeminism, there are considerable differences or dissimilarities between their aims and attitudes. Environmental or ecological crisis, in the view of social ecologists, arise from societal domination and existence of hierarchies within the social system. The different social organizations or institutions, varieties of social practices, as well as private ownership,

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<sup>40</sup> Bookchin, Murray. : *Ecology of Freedom*, Palo Alto, Chief Chesire Books, 1982, p.1

<sup>41</sup> Reuther, R.R. : *Now Earth*, New York, Scabury, 1975, p.204.

capitalization and even creation of nation states establish social hierarchies in which some humans exercise power and domination over others. Existence of such hierarchies and domination can be overcome through practice of the anarchist external control and psychological manipulation, according to the social ecologists. Ecofeminists, on the other hand, identifies the domination of women as the only form of social domination. According to them, the domination or subjugation of women by men is at par with the domination and exploitation of nature by human beings which is the root cause behind environmental destruction. Here lies the necessity of social justice.

### **Necessity of Social Justice: A Parameter of Ecofeminism:**

Before analyzing the necessity of social justice, it is essential to tackle the question: What is meant by social justice? The ethical question underlying the concept of social justice is how we ought to live collectively or how should we live individually. The question, how we ought to live individually actually refers to morality and the question how we ought to live collectively refers to social justice. But what do we mean by social justice? A partial answer to this question is that we ought to respect the right and responsibilities that each of us individually possess. Accordingly, justice is concerned with giving each person his or her due. This actually recalls the view of Aristotle who once says justice means to treat equals equally. This principle is called the formal principle of justice which differs from the utilitarian approach of justice which stands with the principle that the interest of each person should be treated as of equal value. Unlike the formal principle of justice, utilitarian justice argues that environmental resources should be distributed in ways that maximize the greatest happiness of the greatest numbers.

The objective of ecofeminism is directly associated with environmental justice where one can investigate the social distribution of environmental benefits and burdens. A society that distributes the benefits and burdens unequally is *prima facie* unjust. For example, environmental racism is a case in point, in which society places the burden on people in the least advanced position- the poor and the people of colour. Here we can also mention the chipko movement which stands with the view that women do bear a greater environmental burden than man. This again induces the point of sexism or gender differences. In fact those who advocate the view that population growth is one of the prime cause of environmental destruction often set aside the cultural and economic factors that encourage the poor, specially poor women, to value more children rather than fewer children. It has been historically witnessed that oppressive population control policies often target minorities and it includes slavery, Nazism and apartheid.

There is no question of doubt that women and children are the most sufferers in any form of environmental degradation, even though women's contribution in the environmental arena is noteworthy. Women are primarily responsible for domestic chores such as rearing of livestock, tending crops, cooking and maintenance of home, taking care of children. Moreover, women have greater responsibility for the non-mechanized harvesting of crops and thus face risk associated with exposure to pesticide. Women also have less mobility than men to escape pollution and insanitary condition. Women also take responsibility for gathering fuel wood and water without hampering environmental balance. Thus, any industrial advancement which stands to deplete forest lands and also pollute water leads to the exploitation and subjugation of women. We find sufficient evidences in Chipko movement which support in what senses environmental degradation and development in many underdeveloped and developing countries create particular burden for women.

## **Ecofeminism- Making connections:**

We have seen in what sense social ecology has attempted to make a connection between social domination and the domination of nature and thereby is linked with the ecofeminism. Let us pass on to examine in what sense ecofeminism establishes the connection between these two forms of domination.

Ecofeminism, an important and recent branch of environmental ethics, holds important connections such as historical, experiential, symbolic, and theoretical between the domination of women and the domination of nature. The theory of ecofeminism is deeply rooted in feminist ethics, which explores a wide variety of viewpoints concerning the nature and analysis of women's oppression. Ecofeminism, as said earlier, goes a step forward and analyses the link between the domination of women and exploitation of nature.

We have already discussed in the introductory section how the logic of domination justifies domination of both women and nature. Masculine domination over ecofeminism is justified on the ground that men are rational and women are emotional. The characteristic of rationality possessed by men makes them superior to women and hence they are justified in subjugating women according to the logic of domination. Feminist's thinkers vehemently oppose and reject the logic of domination as discussed earlier. Such an opposition against the logic of domination has given rise to different forms of feminism, namely, liberal, Marxist, radical and socialist forms, each of which offers an account of the aggression of women and an alternative social philosophy. Liberal feminists deny gender differences. According to them, all human beings, whether men or women are equal since they all possess the same nature as free rational beings. Accordingly, any differential treatment of women leading to their degradation or devaluation is against moral equality and is therefore unjust. Thus, liberal feminists fight for equal rights and equal opportunity of women. The confinement of women in domestic and household work and in dependent forms of labour make them subjects of oppression

by man, as opined by Marxist feminists. Such feminine form of labour are ignored by men who takes part in the decision making procedure, accumulation of land, property right of ownership over the home, independent and productive form of labour and so on. Such rights and ownership make them exploit a woman which is considered to be unjust. Marxist feminists therefore suggest and encourage active participation of women in independent and productive forms of labour which will give them freedom from economic and political exploitation by men. Social ecofeminists reject the class concept as offered by the Marxist. In their opinion the notion of feminine oppression lies submerged in the complex web of social relationship which includes both economic factors and traditional patterns of gender roles. The Chipko movement is a socialist movement where social feminists tried to liberate women from social and economic oppression by establishing a more autonomous, independent and responsible role of women in the society. Radical feminist's view of female domination lie rooted in biological or sexual differences between men and women. Women are traditionally dominated by men in the society for their inherent status as mother, wife and sex objects. Their child bearing, child raising and sexual capacities make them objects of masculine domination as they are defined as emotional and passive objects, more controlled by body than by mind. Radical feminists, however, claim that the oppression of women by men can be abolished if the gender roles are totally prohibited. They seem to have conceived that feminist's movement should be directed towards a unisex or androgynous culture.

A somewhat different view is held by a different wing of radical feminists. Instead of ignoring the biological differences between men and women, they encourage and celebrate the feminine role arising out of such differences. This view of the radical feminists holds immense importance in the context of ecological crisis. According to the cultural ecofeminists there is a particular women's way of understanding and viewing the world around them. They identify

feminine qualities with nature and hold that nature like women is systematically oppressed. Thus, instead of denying the link between women and nature, cultural ecofeminists aim to rectify ecological and other environmental problems by creating an alternative women's culture based on valuation of the so-called feminine characteristics interconnected to nature, so long devalued by the patriarchal society. Recognition and establishment of the link or interconnection between women and nature has given rise to an ecological ethics based on care and relationship and women's spirituality movement. Both these concepts offer paths leading to solution of ecological crisis which the world is facing. The visualization of women as sexually weak, emotional and overly concerned with the personal and men as sexually strong, rational and objective make them subjugate women and create a patriarchal society. The feminine qualities of love, care and benevolence, sympathy and responsibility etc. arising out of the domestic role of women as mother and wife are ignored and therefore remain outside the area of mainstream ethical theory. Mainstream ethics is based on rational, abstract and universal principles. Many feminists try to go beyond mainstream ethics and evolve an 'ethics of care' based on values traditionally associated with women's role. Such an 'ethics of care; de-emphasizes the so-called abstract roles and principles and thereby plea for a conceptualized ethics based on care and kinship. Moral laws, rights, duties, obligation and justice, the primary convictions of traditional ethics postulates a world where there is a conflict of interests, where demands of justices restrict human freedom and where morality battle egoism. Ethics of care based on values of love and relationship replaces conflict with an attitude of co-operation, confrontation with relationship and right and duties with an approach of love and care for others. Thus care ethics tries to introduce a new dimension to moral philosophy where love, care and motherly attitude, affection and kinship etc. serve as moral ideals instead of abstract principles.

Now the question is: why an ethics of care is introduced or studied only in a women's perspective. According to many ecofeminists, an ethics of care is more compatible with the life experience of women, particularly as those experience follow from both reproductive biology and experiences of women in being a mother. Such experiences of women are natural. Therefore, the vocabulary of rights and duties, autonomy and justice, rules and laws is highly artificial and inappropriate within the context of mother-child relationship. Cultural ecofeminists, the believer and promoter of an ethics of care, acknowledge that women are historically closer to nature than men. Therefore, there underlies a benevolent relationship between women and nature. In this regard, it may be rightly said that an ethics of care covers or incorporates human-nature relationship very much alike mother-child relationship. Accordingly, women, who are thought to experience this caring more directly and more immediately than men, are the more appropriate voice for the protection of nature's interest. In this regard, feminism comes more near to ecology.

An ethics of care is very much related to virtue ethics and in this present context of environmental crisis they replace the traditional abstract and general principles. Accordingly, moral agents confronting with the pertinent question what ought to be done by them, are guided by the affiliation of love and attitude of care and compassion. In this context, the most pin pointed question that needs an immediate answer is, how an ethics of care is related to environmental issues? An ethics of care related to virtue ethics is very much relevant to the prevailing situation of environmental degradation. It guides moral agent to love and care for nature and thereby safeguard nature from deterioration. We have already discussed that an attitude of love, care and compassion very much related to the feminist nature actually gives birth to an ethics of care. The application of care and virtue ethics very much related to the feminine principles of love and care is likely to block environmental degradation to a greater extent. In other words, we may say that 'care ethics' forms an integral part of

environmental ethics where the main objective is to block environmental degradation. Assimilating the points of the aforesaid paragraph it may be said that the objective of ecofeminism, care ethics and environmental ethics is more or less the same and they are very much related to each other. In fact, ecofeminism is an integral part of environmental ethics in which the domination and exploitation of both women and nature is vehemently protested through the application of a kind of ethics based on love and care which is very much situational and does not get bogged down with abstract questions related to non-situational traditional ethics. Rather, an ethics of care deals with the issue: Do we care about nature? What relationship do we hold with the natural surroundings including its entire species? An ethics of care is mostly concerned with the question: how we ought to exist in relationship with our natural surroundings? The application of care ethics is well illustrated in Leopold's injection where he says that we must first come to 'love, respect and admire the land;', before applying the abstract principles of land ethics. The 'Chipko Movement' where women were found embracing trees in order to protect them from rampant felling or exploitation is another glaring illustration of the application of care ethics.

Besides care ethics ecofeminism further extends environmental movement towards women's spirituality in which a spiritual bond between women and nature is pleaded for. This view, of course, stands against western mainstream religion where God is seen outside nature. In western mainstream religion, nature is supposed to be mere matter which is passive, inert, shapeless and dead. Nature is something created by God who has breathed life into it. If women are associated with nature, women are identified as passive, dependent on their bodies. In this regard, mainstream religion very often sees women as lacking the special spirituality that would qualify them as priests, popes, ministers and so on. Thus, there underlies a duality between women and nature. Cultural ecofeminists oppose mainstream

religious stand by bringing the concept of women's spirituality. They intuit a trio-conceptual identification amongst women, nature and the Divine. Recalling ancient religious where God was identified both as the Earth itself and as women, cultural ecofeminists honour spirituality where Goddess is immanent in nature and the natural world is revealed as Divine. Accordingly, the Earth itself is worshiped as Divine and caring for and loving the earth is an ecological responsibility and spiritual upliftment of women. Celebrating Mother Nature (the Greek Goddess Gaia) becomes the way for women's spirituality to rejoice in the sacredness of women and nature.

### **Transformative Feminism: A New Wing of Ecofeminism:**

Very recently, we witness a new form of ecofeminism which is theoretically called 'transformative ecofeminism' which somehow or other attempts to modify the existing form of ecofeminism. Although much literatures are not available on this issue, however its objective is to separate women from men by introducing care ethics. It attempts to establish the close proximity between women and nature and thereby tries to annihilate the so-called dualism between men and women. It also rules out the logic of domination prevailing in mainstream ethics. This view is propounded by Plumwood who intuits transformative feminism as the feminism of uncritical reversal, and sees it as perpetuating women's oppression in a new subtle form. Instead of cultural ecofeminism rooted in radical feminism, ecofeminists like Plumwood and Warren seem to have conceived a third wave of feminism known as integral and transformative feminism. We have seen that the first wave of feminism is rooted in liberal feminism which seeks to end any form of discrimination between men and women and thereby tries to attain equality for women. However, the problem of liberal feminism is that, within the masculine domain equality of women amounts to little more than

requiring women to adopt dominant male traits. This means to say that women can be equal to men only if they become masculine which, in fact, would literally be impossible.

The second wave of feminism is presented by the uncritical reversal of some feminists who promote and celebrate a distinctive female point of view. However, this view again is subjugated by the dominant culture via the logic of domination which justifies women's oppression by men. The third wave of feminism as cited above, therefore, pleads for an alternative to both liberal and radical versions of feminism which views that the domination of nature as well as the domination of women are inextricably connected. Here women have been identified as closer to nature and nature has been identified as feminine and thereby seeks to develop in union an environmental philosophy where the interest of all biotic community can be preserved and honoured. Transformative feminism, thus, tries to reveal the pattern of domination common to the oppression of women and nature and thereby proposes an alternative and non-dualistic way of thinking both for human and non-human nature. It is true to say that a good number of feminists have conceived that culture has identified women with nature. Even, Bacon, a philosopher of the past conceived nature as a woman and nature is to become married to men who will subdue her and turn her into a slave. In this regard, Bacon attempted to associate nature not only with man and marriage, but also with a particularly and abusive type of marriage. Transformative feminism vehemently opposes and criticizes such view. Instead of domination and subjugation of one species by other, transformative feminism celebrates unity within diversity. It is therefore said to be holistic in the sense that it encourages us to realize human beings as essentially a part of natural communities. According to this view human beings should not be conceived in terms of their personal consciousness, thoughts and choices, rather they should be evaluated as an integral part of their social and natural environment.

## **Ecofeminism and its Relation to the Value of Nature:**

Since the domination and exploitation of women on many accounts is at par with the domination and exploitation of nature, understanding ecofeminism equally means understanding the value of nature. Ecofeminism not only explores 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. It equally tries to restore the dignity of nature in moral context. Thus, it can be said that ecofeminism is largely about ethics, norms and values which could support well being of the whole biotic community. Thus, any attempt to cohere feminine with nature is to value nature. Ecofeminism, therefore, seeks to understand the scope of moral respect, the sort of entities which can receive moral attention and the nature of God which morality is supposed to promote.

In fact writing on the value of nature first appeared in Leopold's Land Ethics in which Leopold holds that current needs and values demanded further extension of moral community to include the biotic community. Leopold's apprehension is not only directed towards the inclusion of ecosystem into the domain of environmental ethics, it also restores equal worth to all species. By attributing value to nature ecofeminism rejects speciecism which stands with the belief that human beings are superior to any other form of life. Since human beings, according to speciecism, are superior to any other form of life, only humans have moral value. Transformative feminism, particularly, rejects the view of speciecism as stated above. Nature for them is no longer a constructed concept, rather it ought to be recognized and valued as an end in itself. Any prolonged and critical pre-occupation with values concerning nature and human interaction with non-human organic reality is likely to lead to some recognition of the strange conceptual genesis, history and the force of nature. Unfortunately, men, the possessor of reason exploit nature as a

means to themselves and as a matter of fact the meaning of nature has undergone innumerable transformations. William Cronon, an eminent historian recently says that 'nature is not merely so natural as it seems. Instead, it is a profoundly human construction.'<sup>42</sup>

According to the ecofeminists any form of oppression or its expression is morally illegitimate. Such rejection is basically rooted in the belief that oppressive practices and ideologies harm something of value. Thus oppression and subjugation of women virtually means devaluation of women who individually and categorically share historical, social and political identities with natural communities and environment. The foundation of ethics according to ecofeminists begins with the assertion of the value of our lives, our environment and nature.

According to ecofeminists, ethical interpretations are centred on women's lives, their oppression and nature. Ecofeminists claim that women possess value which is non-instrumental. Since women are akin to nature and hence nature too possesses non-instrumental value. Since women, human beings at large, communities and natural objects and systems possess instrumental value, one should avoid harming them.

Ecological feminism or ecofeminism begins with the conception of human wellbeing which directly follows from the normative implication of feminism which desire to promote the flourishing of women and others. Flourishing of both women and nature is the prime objective of ecofeminism. The underlying philosophical commitment of ecofeminism is to confer moral value on women as well as on nature and identify both as moral agents. In this regard, it may be said that ecofeminism conceives of a moral community with both human and biotic species as its members enjoying moral value. In this regard, feminist ethics appears to be ecological feminism. In trying to confer moral value on women and nature, ecofeminism tries to

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<sup>42</sup> Cronon, William (ed.). : *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 1995, p.25.

highlight the interest of the oppressed communities (nature and women) and treat them as ethically significant. Historically, socially, economically and even philosophically women and nature are not treated as significant moral agents who have become objects of oppression and subjugation. Even mainstream and traditional ethical theories justify mistreatment and exploitation of women and nature. Ecofeminism revolts against the devaluation of both women and nature and strives towards bestowing moral value and treating both as significant moral agents deserving adequate honour and respect to be treated and handled with care and compassion. Thus, the goal or objective of ecofeminism is to construct, uncover and articulate ethics that addresses the patterns and particularities of human agency that create a world riddled with an incredible degree of environmental degradation and human oppression. It tries to correlate women and nature and restore the value of nature as well as the women.

### **Observation:**

We have examined and outlined the objective of ecofeminism in many contexts and thereby cognized that there underlies a close proximity between women and nature. We have no doubt in mind that any form of exploitation and subjugation of women equally leads to the exploitation and extinction of nature and vice versa. However, one thing which is important to note here is that whether the relationship between women and nature as marked by ecofeminism is universal or historical (cultural) is a matter of controversy that deserves a clear cut verdict. Divergence of opinions have been found and discussed. If the relationship between women and nature is based on essence, then the supposed relation is called universal and if it is based on culture, it is called historical. In fact those who stand by the universal relation between women and nature would like to say that any attempt to glorify the motherhood or feminity stems from a reliance on essentialising concept. It may be criticized by saying that any attempt of equating women with nature, women with mother and women with

feminism is not a sound idea either practically or theoretically. If there is any parallelism between women and nature, it actually hinges on essentialism. However, the essentialist approach may not be uncritical and its criticism is theoretically known as anti-essentialism or post modernism. Anti-essentialism or post modernism stands with the idea that the view that women-nature relationship based on essence is uncalled for. It holds that there underlies no essence in context of external, universal and no truths about women relying on essences. This means that a woman is a fiction and the concept of women and gender is nothing but a social construction and in no sense based on metaphysical truth. It further holds that women's universal similarities actually supercede their differences from each other. Thus the claim that woman is closer to nature than men attribute some essential features to women by means of which women are identified with nature. However, such view is not tenable.

We think that the relationship between women and nature cannot be justified by denying either any one of the views stated above. If we look back to the religions and scriptures of the ancient past, it appears that there are plenty of literatures that favoured the essentialistic approach of the relationship between women and nature. Accordingly, we can say that the concept of essentialism in its true sense is not inherently problematic. Equally, the view of post modernism is not altogether irrelevant. In fact in the prevailing patriarchal society, we witness many instances of domination of women based on culture. Thus, we can say that although ecofeminism pleads for essentialism, we have witnessed some conceptual connections and practical relationships articulated by ecofeminists not based on essentialism. Barring essentialism, women and nature are interwoven through cultural construction, practices and biological constitution. In fact when ecofeminists draw the essentialistic apprehension or when they claim that 'women are the mother of earth', they certainly do not take the monolithic stand regarding women, rather they intend to have multiple intentions and meanings

that mothering is necessarily connected to being female and that the female relationship to the planet and its inhabitants ought to be material (post modernism).

Thus women are usually mothers who give birth to future generations and are uniquely relevant to taking care of life on earth. This again confirms that women are socially constructed and are to be identified with mothering in most cultures, perhaps in all. In fact within the prevailing socio-political background, the problem of ecofeminism is more relevant in context of social factors. Accordingly, the relationship between women and nature can be approached pluralistically rather than in a monolithic manner. Indeed we cannot ignore the ways in which these and other subjugating concepts and categories are parasitic and symbolic upon each other. They are enacted on each other and become refined through practice. They even criss-cross in and through people's lines, conceptual schemes and socio-political situations.

