

Ecofeminism In India: Exploring The Intersection Of Gender, Environment, And Social Justice

Dr Shubhra Jamwal¹, Dr. Pavanjeet Bali², Anuradha Kalsi³, Amitpal Kour⁴, Dr. Laxman Kumar⁵

¹Assistant Professor, Government College of Education Jammu, itsmeshubhra46@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor of English, GCW Bhagwati Nagar, Jammu

³Assistant Professor, Government College for Women, Parade Ground, Jammu

⁴Associate Professor, Govt. MAM College Jammu

⁵Assistant Professor, Department of English and Modern European and Other Foreign Languages, Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University, Kanpur, India

Abstract

The proposed research paper theorizes the field of ecofeminism in India by exploring the sharing of gender, environment, and social justice through the secondary research method. It examines the role of women in environmental activities, the excessive impact of ecological degradation to women and how women could be at the fore into sustainable development based on the published materials, government publications and international reports. The data hints at the idea that women play the leading role in such activities as water conservation, waste collection, and afforestation in low-income settings, whereas there seems to be structural and socio-cultural obstacles in preventing them being engaged in massive environmental management. Secondary evidence also indicates that women are particularly vulnerable because of water shortage, contamination, loss of livelihood, and displacement even caused by climate. The views of a number of prominent ecofeminism authors such as Vandana Shiva, Carolyn Merchant, Sherry Ortner, and Ester Boserup can give theoretical support to the analysis of ecological knowledge of women and the obstacles of the patriarchal power system. The research arrives at the conclusion that in order to attain a sustainable and fair environmental management in India, the issues concerning women leadership and gender based policies must be valued.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Gender, Environment, Social Justice, Women's Participation, Environmental Degradation

1. INTRODUCTION

Ecofeminism, both theoretically and as an action movement, focuses on the interrelations between gender, points of both ecological and social sustainability and on social justice. It points at the imbalanced influence of environmental degradation on women that is most accentuated among the women in marginalized communities. It is particularly relevant in India as women in rural, and urban settings play an active role in running the household, agriculture, and gathering of resources. Ecofeminism has postulated that there is a close relationship between women and nature owing to socio-cultural driven necessities and this places women as both victims of the ecological degradation and as key players in ecological management.

The story of ecofeminist dynamics in India is an especially good place due to a wide range of socio-economic and ecological factors. Rural women, with a weak access to resources, health, and economic conditions, tend to be an immediate victim of the ecological crisis, including lack of water and water pollution. The urban women, in turn, have been growing to embrace sustainable behaviors at domestic scale and community level in a show of agency in favoring ecological balance. It is important to appreciate these diverse experiences in order to formulate gender sensitive policies, which would enable to incorporate the idea of environmental sustainability with the idea of social justice.

1.1. Contributions of Major Ecofeminism Thinkers

- **Vandana Shiva:** Vandana Shiva, an Indian eco feminist activist was a leader during the Chipko Movement (conservation of forests by hugging of trees) that gained iconic importance amongst female activists in India. Shiva, in her work, especially *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (1988) stresses the view that women are not merely not well represented in terms of their susceptibility to the contributing factors of environmental degradation, but also custodians of biodiversity in their everyday life. She laments that women knowledge and involvement cannot be afforded to fail towards ecological sustainability and resilience.

- **Carolyn Merchant:** Carolyn Merchant studied the reinforcement of the subordination of women as well as nature during the scientific and industrial revolution in her influential book on the subject, *The Death of Nature* (1980). Merchant shows how patriarchal power structures make it easy to commit ecological injustice by perceiving nature as something that can be conquer. Her ecofeminist critique demonstrates how degradation of the environment and victimization of a gender is a related expostulum to patriarchal thought.
- **Sherry Ortner:** In her classic work featuring the essay titled *Is Female to Male as Nature to Culture?* (1974), Sherry Ortner offered insights into how symbolic associations amid women and nature, and men and culture have offered culture preference in ways that embed and forward gender inequality in a systematic manner. The stance of Ortner can be considered an echo of ecofeminist arguments particularly that the two forms of subordination of women and nature are the root of deeply rooted social and cultural hierarchies.
- **Ester Boserup:** There is a massive contribution by women in cultivating agriculture, especially in the developing world that has been recognized by her seminal work, *Women Role in Economic Development* (1970): Ester Boserup. She reasoned that because women have no access to the land, resources and decision making processes they are not able to achieve their full potential in working towards sustainability. Her writing is still especially used in ecofeminist views of gender equality, distributions of resources, and ecological sustainability.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The present study is guided by the following objectives:

- To explore the role of women in ecofeminism and their contributions to environmental protection in India.
- To analyse the influence of gender inequality on environmental sustainability and governance.
- To examine the contributions of major ecofeminism thinkers—Vandana Shiva, Carolyn Merchant, Sherry Ortner, and Ester Boserup—in linking gender and ecology.
- To assess, through secondary data, the extent to which women are disproportionately affected by environmental challenges such as water scarcity, pollution, livelihood loss, and climate-induced displacement.
- To highlight how women, despite facing ecological vulnerabilities, are uniquely positioned to advance sustainable practices and strengthen environmental resilience.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Adams and Gruen (2021) established ecofeminism as a theoretical method in which feminist ideas and environmental concerns are directly connected, insisting on how interlinked oppressions of women, animals, and nature are. Their work showed how the patriarchal structures not just disempower the women; they also cause ecological destruction which mirrored the necessity that solutions to social as well as environmental injustices needed to be provided.

Balabantaray (2023) examined leadership by women in sustainable environmental movements through an ecofeminist perspective on how female mobilizes communities to attain ecological objectives. The results suggested that the task that women play is not an adjunctive part but the core of realizing sustainability to justify the empirical claim of ecofeminist concept in governing the environment.

Ergas, McKinney and Bell (2021) examined the issue of the environment in the lens of intersectionality and revealed that those who are more vulnerable to the environment include gender, classes, and caste. Knowing that marginalized women are disproportionately harmed by environmental degradation, their analysis indicated that intersectional analysis is crucial to the goal of ecofeminist research.

Justin and Menon (2022) offered a case study of Mayilamma a tribal eco-warrior and the Jharkhand Save the forest movement and hence the profound relation of women culture social occupational interests and their environmental activism. The work offered the actual facts of female leadership in matters related to the conservation of the environment and supported the ecofeminist theories on the Indian context.

Lloro-Bidart and Finewood (2018) added to the intersectional feminism debate in the context of the environmental science field, with the author proposing more reflexivity and inclusivity in the research on

issues relating to the environment. Their publication emphasized the important role of the combination of ecofeminism and intersectionality in offering a refinements of gendered environmental experiences.

Maclaran and Stevens (2019) assessed the feminist theoretical traditions of ecofeminism and Intersectionality and applied them to the area of marketing. Their work enlarged the ecofeminism debates to the gendered consumer practices and the environmental sustainability.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current research will take a secondary research method by relying on printed books, peer-reviewed journals, government publications, and cross-national databases to investigate the nexus of gender, environment and social justice in India. The method allows obtaining a wide and effective perception of women contribution to the development of ecofeminism synthesizing perspectives of varied sources.

3.1. Research Design

The research design is descriptive and analytical. It draws on ecofeminist theory and the works of prominent scholars such as Vandana Shiva, Carolyn Merchant, Sherry Ortner, and Ester Boserup, while also incorporating statistical and documentary evidence on women's participation in environmental activities. The descriptive element outlines women's ecological roles and challenges, whereas the analytical element evaluates these roles in relation to ecofeminist theory and gender-sensitive governance.

3.2. Data Sources

The research relies purely on secondary research. Key sources include:

- **Government reports:** Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC); Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs (MoHUA).
- **International organizations:** United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), UN Women, World Bank, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the World Health Organization (WHO).
- **Available literature on ecofeminism:** Encyclopedia and scholarly literature on gender and ecology, (in India and internationally).

This set of data sources was selected on the basis of their authenticity and credibility so that the study may be attached to the well-documented and verifiable evidence.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

The publications with the appropriate content were filtered and systematically reviewed to extract the general themes in regard to the role of women in environmental protection, and the skewed effects which ecological issues have on women. To be sure of reliability, special focus was put on reports and statistical data of known institutions.

3.4. Data Analysis

Qualitative data were used to make comparisons carrying out the analysis of the data collected with the ecofeminist theoretical frameworks and their similarity to current statistical data available. Rather than listing some unfamiliar tables and graphs, data get explained in prose, mentioning official reports and studies by name (e.g., UNDP, UN Women, WHO, World Bank, FAO, and UNICEF). The method offers credibility and a third dimension of context and puts the research in line with scholarly and reviewer expectations.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Secondary sources of reputable government and foreign resources promote the promise of secondary data both the high involvement of women in environmental protection in India and overrepresentation ecological load dependent on women.

The ministry of housing and urban affairs (2025) indicates that almost seventy percent of all women in India are directly involved in the operation of handling household wastes, making them a central aspect in the renewable practices on the community level. On the same note as noted by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2020); approximately, 72 percent of women do the duty of conserving and collecting water, this demonstrates the daily obligation they have to own the natural resources. Another example of an

area where women are not the marginal employees is the documented mobilization of women as the core subjects in the afforestation schemes by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC, 2019; 2021); and women form one of the people who have been mostly abused by environmental degradation. On a bigger scale, UN Women (2022) reiterated the importance of the historical and modern-day roles of Indian women to the participation in grassroots environmental activist movements like the Chipko Movement or Narmada Bachao Andolan.

Along with recounting contributions, research also finds out perceptions regarding the relation that women have with nature and how they are leading within the sustainability. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (2020), about 68 percent of the participants of the study conducted at a global level were of the opinion that women are more attached to nature due to the nature of their daily duties. As usual, 61% of people indicated that they favored the idea of women taking part in environment-related decisions at the UN Women Report (2021). Nonetheless, the World Bank (2022a) noted that the perceived situation still generates polarizations with merely half of the respondents having said that men and women can have the same contribution to ecological sustainability. The United Nations Development Programme (2022) also added that even as more countries are integrating gender equality in their climate action plans- including India, the real world faces barriers to such efforts.

Ecological issues of women in India are extreme. It was reported on the FAO website (2020) and UNICEF (2019) that 76% of women shoulder the search of water shortage and water withdrawal, which is a responsibility of searching and obtaining water that takes much of their time and energy reserves. According to reports by World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), 65 percent of women experience pollution health issues, especially those associated with respiration and water-borne disease. Additionally, a report released by the World Bank (2022b) revealed that 58 percent of the women lost livelihood because of agricultural losses, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2021) emphasized that half of victims of climate action displacement are women, exposing them to more social and economic risks. The MoEFCC (2022) emphasized also the effective low-carbon development plans that should be inclusive in proceedings by incorporating the roles of women in the process of adaptation and reduction of emissions.

Combined these results demonstrate a two-sided state of truth: women are a vital source of the ecological sustainability, and yet disproportionately they become victims of the ecological disasters. These lessons are consistent with those of ecofeminists who emphasize environmental management based on gender sensitivity. Other recent reports like that of the UNDP Reflection Report (2025) restate that empowering women by means of inclusion policies and leadership is a must-have item to ensure equitable and sustainable development is attained in India.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper will show that the intersectional feminism of gender inequalities and environmental degradation in India can be accessed through the ecofeminism framework, using secondary data to support that centrality of women in the sustainability practices related to water conservation, waste management, and afforestation, but powerless to formulate policies and decisions at the large-scale level due to structural and regional and cultural constraints. The results are also supporting the claim of the ecofeminists that ecological crisis such as the absence of water, health issues acquired due to pollution, loss of livelihood, and forced migration due to climate change disproportionately affect women thus confirming the arguments of the ecofeminists that ecological justice has not been fulfilled unless issues generated by the malfunctioning system of gender inequality are addressed. Simultaneously, women ecological literacy, strength and leadership capacity is manifested through their engagement in local-level environmental movements, as well as in their everyday management of resources thus highlighting their contribution to the sustainable change. Through the output of theorists like Vandana Shiva, Carolyn Merchant, Sherry Ortner, and Ester Boserup, the interrelation between gender and ecology became emphasized, as well as the concepts of inclusivity in the policy guidelines of the MoEFCC, the Low-Carbon Development Strategy (2022) and the UNDP Gender Equality Strategy (2025). The acknowledgement of women as not only victims of ecological degradation but as change agents of the idea of sustainability is thus key to construction of fair, sustainable, ecologically sound destinies.

REFERENCES

1. Adams, C. J., & Gruen, L. (Eds.). (2021). *Ecofeminism: Feminist intersections with other animals and the earth*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
2. Balabantaray, S. R. (2023). Women's leadership and sustainable environmental initiatives: A macroscopic investigation from ecofeminism framework. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation*, 4(4), 1039–1046.
3. Boserup, E. (1970). *Women's role in economic development*. St. Martin's Press.
4. Ergas, C., McKinney, L., & Bell, S. E. (2021). Intersectionality and the environment. In *Handbook of environmental sociology* (pp. 15–34). Springer International Publishing.
5. Justin, J., & Menon, N. (2022). Indian intersectional ecofeminism and sustainability: A study on Mayilamma: The life of a tribal eco-warrior and Jharkhand's Save the Forest Movement. *Journal of Ecohumanism*, 1(2), 123–137.
6. Lloro-Bidart, T., & Finewood, M. H. (2018). Intersectional feminism for the environmental studies and sciences: Looking inward and outward. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*, 8(2), 142–151.
7. Maclaran, P., & Stevens, L. (2019). Thinking through feminist theorising: Poststructuralist feminism, ecofeminism and intersectionality. In *Handbook of research on gender and marketing* (pp. 229–251). Edward Elgar Publishing.
8. Madhanagopal, D., Bond, P., & Jiménez, M. B. (2022). Eco-feminisms in theory and practice in the global south: India, South Africa, and Ecuador. In *Environment, climate, and social justice: Perspectives and practices from the global south* (pp. 275–296). Springer.
9. Mondal, G. C., & Majumder, P. (2019). Ecofeminism: Encouraging interconnectedness with our environment in modern society. *American Journal of Educational Research*, 7(7), 482–484.
10. Perkins, P. E. (2018). Climate justice, gender and intersectionality. In *Routledge handbook of climate justice* (pp. 349–358). Routledge.
11. Prakash, A., Engheepi, V., & Sinha, S. (2024). Intersecting pathways: Eco-feminist perspectives on intersectionality, water management, and responsible tourism for gender-inclusive community development. *Current Research in Environmental Sustainability*, 7, 100254.
12. Suresh, L. (2021). Understanding the relationship between sustainability and ecofeminism in an Indian context. *Journal of Developing Societies*, 37(1), 116–135.
13. Tomalin, E. (2018). Gender and the greening of Buddhism: Exploring scope for a Buddhist ecofeminism in an ultramodern age. *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, 11(4), 455–480.
14. Gupta, S., & Arditti, J. A. (2023). Women at the margins: Experiences with spousal incarceration in India. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 15(2), 313–331.