



**ECOFEMINISM AND SDG AGENDA 2030: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE**



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**ABSTRACT**

*Ecofeminism, also called ecological feminism, is an offshoot of feminism that establishes and examines the ties between women and nature. Ecofeminism uses the foothold of feminism and shares its premises of parity between sexes, a reassessment of non-patriarchal or nonlinear structures, and a vision of the globe that pays reverence for “natural” lifestyle. It promotes use of organic products, opposes the mindless onslaught on natural resources, and believes in harmony inculcated in the philosophy of Symbiosis. Ecofeminism is committed to the protection of the environment and an awareness of the associations made between women and nature. Specifically, this philosophy emphasizes the ways both nature and women are treated by patriarchal society. Ecofeminists scrutinise the impact of gender categories in order to pinpoint the ways in which*

*social paradigms cast dominance over women and nature. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call for action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The 17 SDGs are integrated; they imply that action in one area will affect the same in others. The SDGs envisage development as moving forward keeping fine balance between social, economic and environmental sustainability. They are designed to end poverty, hunger, AIDS, and discrimination against women and girls. The present paper is a dispassionate attempt to touch upon different aspects of SDG Agenda 2030 and test the feasibility of its accomplishment in the light of the journey of ecofeminism in the developing countries like India.*

## RESEARCH PAPER

Despite all its atrocities and agonies, the Corona pandemic has given us an unprecedented opportunity to stop for a while, peep into our 'selves' and audit our activities. It is high time we took nature seriously and stopped taking everything for granted. Human race needs to understand its role both as the trustee and beneficiary of the breathing planet. Literature can help us at this juncture as an influential medium to nurture awareness about ecological concerns. Nature and literature have always shared a close relationship as is evident in the work of many poets and writers down the ages. Ecocriticism aims at studying the deep-rooted connection between literature and the corporeal milieu. The foremost task of ecocriticism is to restore 'Nature' as the centre of all human activity and advocate its supremacy over man-made 'Culture'. The term is believed to be coined by William Rueckert in 1978, who defines it as the "application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature" (Rueckert 1978: 71). To quote Lawrence Coupe, ecocriticism:

...challenges the logic of industrialism, which assumes that nothing matters beyond technological progress. Thus, it offers a radical alternative to both 'right' and 'left' political positions, both of which assume that means of production must always be developed, no matter what the cost... it challenges the complacent culturalism which renders other species, as well as flora and fauna, subordinate to the human capacity for signification. Thus, it queries the validity of treating nature as something which is "produced by language" ... (It) debates "Nature" in order to defend nature (2000:5).

Ecocriticism emerged as an independent literary practice in the USA in the late 1980's. In the last two decades, it has spread its roots rapidly in many parts of the world. In India, too, literature has been playing an important role in developing eco consciousness among the readers. Prominent literary forms like poems, short stories and novels comment on ecological problems and interdependence between the human beings and nature. Ecofeminism, also called ecological feminism, is an offshoot of feminism that establishes and examines the ties between women and nature. Its name was coined by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974. Ecofeminism uses the foothold of feminism and shares its premises of parity between sexes, a reassessment of non-patriarchal or nonlinear structures, and a vision of the globe that pays reverence for "natural" lifestyle. It promotes use of organic products, opposes the mindless onslaught on natural resources, and believes in *harmony* inculcated in the philosophy of Symbiosis. Ecofeminism is committed to the protection of the environment and an awareness of the associations made between women and nature. Specifically, this philosophy emphasizes the ways both nature and women are treated by patriarchal society. Ecofeminists scrutinise the impact of gender categories in order to pinpoint the partial ways in which social paradigms cast dominance over women and nature. The philosophy also contends that those norms lead to an incomplete glimpse of the universe. Ecofeminists advocate an alternative worldview that reveres the "mother" earth, acknowledges nature as the source of survival, and adopts an embracing viewpoint that upholds dignity to every living (and non-living) being.

The modern ecofeminist movement arose out of a series of serious deliberations hosted by an alliance of academic and professional women in the United States. It blossomed in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The participants discussed the ways in which feminism and environmentalism might be combined to promote respect for females and the nature. The

foundation of this initiative was to oppose the fallacy of associating women with nature only for the oppression of both. During these debates and dialogues, it was identified that “women and nature were often depicted as chaotic, irrational, and in need of control, while men were frequently characterized as rational, ordered, and thus capable of directing the use and development of women and nature”. This misconception culminates in a hierarchical structure that ascribes infinite power to men and allows for the subjugation of women and nature. Thus, the founders of ecofeminism resolved that the predicament of women and nature are interlinked and should be tackled together.

In its formative years, ecofeminism relied mainly on documenting historical connections between womankind and the environment and looking for ways to detach those bonds to liberate both. Rosemary Ruether, one of the founders of this movement, expected that all women must end the control of nature if they were to proceed with pace towards their own liberation. She urged the women and ecologists to operate hand in hand to wind up patriarchal systems “that privilege hierarchies, control, and unequal socioeconomic relations”. Ruether’s appeal received huge response from the feminist scholars and activists. They critiqued ecological theories that ignored the impact of patriarchy as well as equalist theories that did not cross-examine the association between women and nature.

Ecofeminism stepped out of academic circles and became a mass movement by 1990. Ynestra King deserves the credit of fetching this thought to the doorstep of the citizens. In her thought-provoking article, “What is Ecofeminism?” she dared the Americans to reconsider their exploitative ways that lead to the oppression of nature and women. This article served as the manifesto of ecofeminism by providing it strength, scope and support.

The split between the ecofeminist ideologies resulted into two distinct schools of thought: radical ecofeminism and cultural ecofeminism. The former contends that “the dominant patriarchal society equates nature and women in order to degrade both”. They are particularly interested in highlighting the practices which foster attributes of commodity on women and nature. On the other hand, the latter encourages sensitive association between the two. They enlist the features that bring women closer to nature than men because of their role as the family nurturer and their capacity to produce and lactate life. Apart from these two, an emerging school of ecofeminism emphasizes the need to incorporate the tenets of queer theory into the precepts of ecofeminism. They propose that ecofeminism should fight against systems of oppression and domination within the dynamics of gender. Of course, excluding the exceptions, all ecofeminists work toward “the development of theory and action that acknowledge the problems inherent in patriarchal and hierarchical systems”. They also insist on solving those problems through awakened accord and nonviolent means.

In the Indian context, the “Chipko” Movement occurred in the 1970s is the earliest ecofeminist movement. The historic movement was basically a non-violent protest against deforestation in the region of Uttarakhand. The term *Chipko* stands for the act of hugging or embracing. It was one of the foremost movements which was led by the women, who were either illiterate or hailed from the lower strata of the society. They unitedly objected to the large scale cutting of trees in the Himalayan region to cater to the rise in demand. This afforestation paved the way for waterlogging and erosion of soil. The women in the region had to face innumerable problems due to this. Thus began their silent protest against commercialisation and reduction of the forested land. The women in the region of Reni in Uttarakhand displayed commendable courage by embracing two thousand trees that were



planned for chopping. This gesture had a wide-reaching impact and the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, banned the commercial cutting in the province of Uttarakhand for a decade. This movement had a lionesses' share in shaping the ecofeminist discourse across the globe. The recurrent instances of attacks on the eco sensitive zones, reported worldwide, attracted the attention of the administrators, policy makers, and academicians. The 'Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs), also known as the 'Global Goals', were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a combined effort to eradicate poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity to everyone by 2030. Countries across the world have committed to prioritize progress for those who are lagging behind. There are 17 goals in all that are integrated with a view to balance social, economic and environmental sustainability:

- 1 *No Poverty*
- 2 *Zero Hunger*
- 3 *Good Health and Well-Being*
- 4 *Quality Education*
- 5 ***Gender Equality***
- 6 ***Clean Water and Sanitation***
- 7 ***Affordable and Clean Energy***
- 8 *Decent Work and Economic Growth*
- 9 *Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure*
- 10 *Reduced Inequalities*
- 11 *Sustainable Cities and Communities*
- 12 ***Responsible Consumption and Production***
- 13 ***Climate Action***
- 14 ***Life Below Water***
- 15 ***Life on Land***
- 16 ***Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions***
- 17 *Partnerships for the Goals*

The (deliberately) highlighted goals attest to the fact that the prominent parameters of progress and development envisioned by ecofeminism have been paid heed to at the apex level.

In India, the SDG Vertical acts as the nodal agency for coordinating and monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals. It works in collaboration with Union Ministries and States/ Union Territories. The Vertical operates with various key stakeholders, including the Government, NGOs, civil society, private sector, academia, think tanks, and research organisations. At the same time, as the official website of the NitiAayog admits:

Localisation of SDGs is crucial to any strategy aimed at achieving the goals under the 2030 Agenda. Localising SDGs involves the process of adapting, planning, implementing and monitoring the SDGs from national to local levels by relevant institutions and stakeholders.

A study undertaken in this direction reached the conclusion that "progress in these sectors will require additional spending as a percentage of GDP." As SDGs cover almost every area of development, all Line Ministries share the responsibility to accomplish them within the stipulated period. In particular, the SDG has close associations with:

- Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation
- Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region
- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
- Ministry of Women and Child Development

The Women and Child Development (WCD) Division is formulated to provide policy guidance and oversee the implementation of the programmes of the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD). It aims at empowering women and helping them nurture their children. The Core Functions of this Division are as under:

- To improve nutritional indicators, especially stunting, wasting and birth weight, and anaemia, of women and children.
- To make policy briefs on geriatric nutrition, the age of marriage and motherhood, and urban health and nutrition.
- To prepare reports, as per PMO's mandate, on *Poshan Abhiyaan* and *Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana* (PMMVY).
- To evaluate the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme of MoWCD.
- To extend support to MoWCD to strengthen childcare institutions and the food fortification programme.
- To develop pilots for the promotion of millets in safety net schemes, nutri-gardens in the Aspirational Districts, CSR funding of critical projects in health and nutrition in the Aspirational Districts, among others.
- To undertake relevant research and development.

On 13 April, 2021, the NITI Aayog launched *Poshan Gyan*, a national digital repository on health and nutrition. It is in partnership with Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Centre for Social and Behaviour Change, Ashoka University. The *Poshan Gyan* repository is a resource to enable search of communication materials on 14 thematic areas of health and nutrition across diverse languages, media types, target audiences and sources.

Unfortunately, however, the Aayog that decides the "Niti" for a huge nation comprising of 48.04 % (662.90 million) female population accommodates only one representative (Nirmala Sitharaman) of the gender. At this juncture, it is pertinent to balance this proportion by inclusion of spirited women with authentic environmental concern, experience and expertise like Vandana Shiva, Medha Patkar and Arundhati Roy. To conclude, it is essential to advance the notion of a 'green economy' in tune with 'good governance'.

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