

ECOFEMINISM AND VANDANA SHIVA: COMBATING THE GENDER IDEOLOGIES AND EMBRACING THE FEMININE PRINCIPLE FOR A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

N. BLESSY SORNA PUSHPA

Registration no: **18211284012042**

Research Scholar

nbspushpa@gmail.com

V.O. Chidambaram College, Thoothukudi.

Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli, Tamilnadu, India.

DR. V. RANI PRIYADHARSHINI

Assistant Professor of English

ranipriyadharshini@gmail.com

V.O. Chidambaram College, Thoothukudi.

Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli, Tamilnadu, India.

ABSTRACT

Vandana Shiva, the leading environmental activist who is also a prominent ecofeminist holds the belief that there's a strong interconnectedness between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women. She emphasizes the significance of recognizing the deep-rooted links between environmental issues and gender inequality. Shiva advocates for a holistic worldview that values both ecological sustainability and gender justice. Ecofeminism aims to change the world's way of relating to things like women and the environment. To Shiva, Ecofeminism is a movement that is against these three apartheid. They are the separation of men and women from nature, artificial hierarchy between men and women, and the economic

disparity between peasants and capitalists. She believes and contends that there should be no hierarchies and provides a non-gender based philosophy called the feminine principle as a solution for environmental justice. It is through this philosophy a sustainable environmental justice can be achieved.

Keywords: liberation, feminine principle, gender ideology, ecofeminism.

ECOFEMINISM AND VANDANA SHIVA: COMBATING THE GENDER IDEOLOGIES AND EMBRACING THE FEMININE PRINCIPLE FOR A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Ecofeminism aims to change the world's way of relating to things like women and the environment. Recognizing the rights of both Mother Earth and women is pivotal to combating the violence inflicted upon them. At its core, the capitalist patriarchal paradigm dismisses nature's vitality, characterizing it as lifeless, and it relegates women to a secondary status. This ideology perpetuates violence against both nature and women, culminating in irreparable ecological and societal damage. Instead of domination and power hierarchies, ecofeminism aims to establish equality and a community that interact on a level playing field.

Mother Earth and Women embody the life-sustaining energies that nurture the planet, households, and communities. Capitalist patriarchy, however, perceives nature solely as a resource to be exploited, disregarding women's knowledge and their contributions to sustenance. This system gauges progress based on GDP, an approach conducive to commodification and trade. This profit-driven economy has exploited both the environment and women, projecting a facade of boundless growth on a planet with finite resources.

Embedded within the concept of earth democracy, ecofeminism acknowledges the innate creativity, productivity, and intelligence of all entities. It asserts that, as members of the Earth family, we share an intrinsic equality, and any form of violence against the environment and women is intolerable. Ecofeminism strives to transcend the narrow confines of the capitalist-patriarchal viewpoint, which interprets differences as hierarchical and considers uniformity as a prerequisite for equality. By addressing inherent inequalities within global structures, ecofeminism embraces and celebrates our rich diversity.

Vandana Shiva, the environmental activist is also a leading eco-feminist. The commercialization of her hometown forest and river turned her focus from academics to activism. Her involvement in the Chipko movement triggered her to become the voice for the voiceless. Her organization 'Navdanya' is a movement for Earth Democracy which is based on the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam which means that earth is one family. To her Ecofeminism is a movement that is against the following three apartheid. They are the separation of men and women from nature, the artificial hierarchy between men and women, and the economic disparity between peasants and capitalists. Shiva believes that this separation has led to the domination of man over nature leading to their destruction.

Focusing on combating the gender ideologies for a sustainable environmental justice, Shiva contends that there should be no hierarchies that allow the domination of one over the other. Earth is one family and every entity is placed in a horizontal line with each of their differences being highly valued. Ecofeminism brings out a perspective that highlights the interdependence between humans and nature. This philosophy strives for a harmonious relationship where equality, community and respect replace the irrational hierarchal power structures.

The Western ideology of duality has led to the domination of women by men. Nurturing, caring, sustainable and feminine characteristics are held as a submissive character placing both nature and women as dispensable and something to be owned and exploited. On the contrary cultural/spiritual eco-feminists encouraged the association between women and the environment. They declared that women have a closer intimate relationship with nature because of their gender roles and their biology. Both women and nature have the characteristics of being a nurturer and a provider and these connections have made women more sensitive to the problems associated with the environment.

In gender ideologies, one can see categories like ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ which are socially and culturally constructed. The socially constructed gender ideology sees the concept of woman as the ‘other’. It views femininity as something that is not masculine and therefore must be subjected to domination. There are two gender-based responses to the process of domination. One is by Simon de Beauvoir and the other is by Herbert Marcuse. According to Simon de Beauvoir, gender is based on the acceptance of feminine and masculine as biologically established, and the women’s status as the second sex is similarly determined. Beauvoir conceived that women’s liberation can be attained only by masculination of the female. The liberation that de Beauvoir conceived of is a world in which masculine is accepted as the superior and women are free to assume masculine values. Thus the process of liberation of women is thus a masculination of the world as defined by Simon de Beauvoir (gender- based ideology). He accepts the patriarchal categorisation of women as passive, weak and unproductive. It is because he subscribes to the myth of man-the-hunter as a superior being. But this myth of female passivity and masculine creativity has been criticized by feminist scholar disclosing that the survival of mankind has been much more

because of ‘woman the gatherer’ rather than by ‘man-the-hunter’. Lee and de Vore have empirical records that prove that women provide up to 80 percent of the daily food, whereas men only contribute a small portion by hunting. Maria Mies argued that this relationship with nature where men hunted was necessarily violent, destructive and predatory which is in sharp contrast to the relationship women had with nature as the gatherer or cultivator.

It is quite clear that humanity wouldn’t have survived if man-the-hunter’s productivity had been the only source for daily subsistence. Yet this patriarchal ideology has made man-the-hunter as the model of human evolution thus adopting violence and domination as its structural component. It is not the process but the elevation of the hunting to the level of ideology that has laid the foundation for man’s violent relationship with nature.

Mies concludes that this patriarchal paradigm has made man-the-hunter, an exemplar of human productivity not as a producer but basically as a parasite. Therefore with the reversal of categories made possible by focussing on the production of life, the masculinisation of the feminine is no longer a viable option for liberation.

Unlike Simon de Beauvoir, Herbert Marcuse sees “liberation as a feminisation of the world: In as much as the male principle has been the ruling mental and physical force, a free society would be the ‘definite negation’ of this principle – it would be a female society”. (SA, 51)

Gender ideology has created dualism between male and female. It has created an association of activity and creativity with violence and the masculine and passivity and non-violence with feminine. Gender- based responses to this dualism normally prescribed either the masculinization or feminization of the world. However, there is a

third concept known as the feminine principle which works on inclusiveness resulting in the liberation of both nature and women. This feminist input serves not just women but also men.

In this non-gender-based philosophy the feminine principle is not exclusively embodied in women but is the principle of activity and creativity in nature, women and men. One cannot really distinguish the masculine from the feminine, person from nature, Purusha from Prakriti. Though distinct, they remain inseparable in dialectical unity, as two aspects of one being. The recovery of the feminine principle is thus associated with the non-patriarchal, non-gendered category of creative non-violence, or 'creative power in peaceful form', as Tagore stated in his prayer to the tree. (Shiva, SA, 52)

This gender perspective can recover humanity by throwing away the distorted form of the victim and oppressor and it helps create a new wholeness in both that transcends gender because gender identity is nothing but an ideological, social and political construct. The recovery of the feminine principle is the answer to multiple dominations and deprivations that have oppressed women, nature and non-western cultures. Feminine principle stands for ecological recovery, nature's liberation, women's liberation and also the liberation of men who in dominating nature and women have sacrificed their own humanness. The recovery of feminine principle is based on inclusiveness where it views gender neither as a man or women but as a transgender. Through this recovery nature is seen as a living organism, women are seen as productive and active and finally men undergo a relocation of action and activity where they create life-enhancing and not life-reducing and life-threatening societies.

The problem with gender-based responses to gender-based ideologies that associates domination and violence with man and passivity and non-violence with women is that it treats this ideologically constructed gender categorization as given by nature. Gandhi, the preacher of non-violence is after all a man. Therefore the historical creation of a gender divide constructed by gender ideology cannot be the basis of gender liberation. The recovery of the feminine principle is true liberation.

In feminine principle there is no divide between man and nature, or between man and woman, because it believes that life in all forms arises from the feminine principle. In Indian cosmology, person and nature are a duality in unity. They are inseparable complement of one another in nature, in woman, in man. In India, every form of creation bears the sign of this dialectical unity of diversity within a unifying principle and this dialectical harmony between the male and female principles and between nature and man becomes the basis of ecological thought and action. Since there is no dualism between man and nature and because nature as Prakriti sustains life, nature has been treated as integral and inviolable. Prakriti, is an everyday concept which organises daily life.

As an embodiment and manifestation of the feminine principle it is characterised by (a) creativity, activity, productivity; (b) diversity in form and aspect; (c) connectedness and inter- relationship of all beings, including man; (d) continuity between the human and natural; and (e) sanctity of life in nature. (Shiva, SA, 40)

Earth is in the form of a Great Mother who is creative and protective.

Destruction started when Prakriti (nature) became natural resource. But this shift is what is considered as progressive shift from superstition to rationality. When there is disruption in nature's processes, its cycle and her inter- connectedness, for women

whose productivity in the sustaining of life is based on nature's productivity, the death of Prakriti simultaneously leads to their own marginalisation, displacement, devaluation and ultimate dispensability. Therefore it can be seen that the ecological crisis is at its root, the death of feminine principle.

For an ecologically sustainable future one needs to gain much from the world-views of ancient civilisations and diverse cultures that has survived sustainably over centuries. It sustained because it was based on the ontology of the feminine as the living principle and on an ontological continuity between society and nature (i.e.) the humanisation of nature and the naturalisation of society, allowing the creation of an earth family.

This concept of the Feminine principle promoted by Ecofeminism exemplified in the work of Vandana Shiva, offers a transformative approach to addressing environmental challenges. The feminine principle, when put into action has the potential to drive positive changes and promote sustainable environmental practices. By nurturing sustainable agricultural practices, conserving biodiversity, empowering women, resisting corporate exploitation, advocating for environmental justice and promoting sustainable consumption, the feminine principle offers a pathway to create a more harmonious and equitable relationship with nature.

WORKS CITED

Mies, Maria, and Vandana Shiva. *Ecofeminism*. Rawat Publications, 2010.

Miles, Kathryn. "Ecofeminism | Sociology, Environmentalism and Gender Equality."

Encyclopedia Britannica, 9 Oct. 2018,

www.britannica.com/topic/ecofeminism.

Raj, Sushma, and Manjula Davidson. "Ecofeminism: The Pragmatic Posture of

Feminism in 21st Century." *ARC Journals*, vol. 2, no. 8, Aug. 2014, pp. 1–6.

IJSELL, www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijSELL/v2-i8/1.pdf.

Shiva, Vandana. *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace*. North Atlantic Books, 2005.

---. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*. Women Unlimited, 2010.