



RELEVANCE OF ECOFEMINISM IN THE MODERN WORLD

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Abstract

As humans progressed in the path of development it became coterminous with the exploitation of natural resources. The viewpoint of *Nature-as-usufruct* prevailed in almost all the societies until the 1970s when Green Politics in the West became a part of mainstream politics and started debating on the environmental implications of the governmental policies in diverse areas. Around the same time, another movement was initiated that conceived of women as distinct social groups but with unequal social status and opportunities vis-à-vis men. Both the movements found a common ground of subjugation by “man” and the result was the rise of a new concept termed *ecofeminism*.

Originating in the 1970s, the question that arises is whether this concept is relevant in the modern world or not. The answer to this may be found in the *Sustainable Development Goals* adopted by the nations across the globe. Ensuring gender equality and environmental protection and conservation have been some of the most important among these and ecofeminism addresses both these issues.

Key Words: Environment, women, sustainable development.

Introduction

As humans progressed in the path of development, the process itself became coterminous with the exploitation of the natural resources. Soon the concept of ‘*Nature-as-usufruct*’ became the dominant view in almost all societies. It was only in the 1970s, when *Green Politics* shifted from the state of voluntary social groups to mainstream politics, that the concern for ecological disaster and environmental crisis attracted the attention of the academicians and activists. This was followed by open debates regarding the environmental implications of governmental policies in diverse areas.



Around the same time, another movement also originated highlighting on “women” as distinct social groups but with unequal social status vis-à-vis men. This was the feminist movement that advocated that social inequalities between men and women work to the advantage of men with the result that men and women have unequal power, status and opportunities.

Both the movements, that is, environmentalism and feminism found a common ground of subordination by “man” (meaning humans in case of environmentalism and men in case of feminism) and thus emerged a new environmental philosophy named as “*ecofeminism*.”

Origin of the Concept

The term ecofeminism, the original expression being ‘*ecological femiane*’ was coined by the French feminist **Francois d’ Eaubonne**. It appeared for the first time in her book ‘*La feminismeou la mort*’ in 1974 which was later translated into English as ‘*Feminism or Death*.’ The term expresses the strong connection existing between the oppression and suppression of women in families and society and the degradation of Nature.

Essence of the Concept

According to the ecofeminists, the devalued conditions of women and environment are two sides of the same coin. For them, patriarchy is the root cause of all world problems. Nature is essentially epitomized as feminine and male ownership of land and other natural resources leads to a dominator culture. Hence, they use words like ‘*tame the Nature*’, ‘*reap Nature’s bounty*’ and so on.

Relevance in the Modern World

As mentioned earlier, the term ecofeminism was coined in 1970s and the first ecofeminist conference dates back in the 1980s. it was organized at Amherst with the theme ‘*Women and Life on Earth: A Conference on Ecofeminism in the Eighties*.’ With time, several lines of thought also emerged within the movement. The question that arises now is that, whether this concept is still relevant in the modern world or not.



To start with, the process of development initiated by the capitalist patriarchy views productivity not from the point of survival but in terms of capital accumulation. Hence, Nature and women who are constantly engaged in the act of producing and reproducing life are considered as *'unproductive'* and reduced to mere supplier of resources and inputs. This outlook has introduced dualities between humans and Nature and men and women. The consequence is that, a process of *'maldevelopment'* has set in that has not only led to ecological crisis but has also destroyed the nurturing Nature and nurturing economies that was otherwise based on the harmony between Nature's work and women's work. It is here that ecofeminism still finds its relevance with efforts now being made to make the process of development more sustainable.

Today, the *Sustainable Development Goals* have been adopted by most countries of the world in which ensuring gender equality and environmental conservation have been among the two most important goals. On one hand while ecofeminism envisions of a sustainable economy, on the other hand, it conceptualizes of a non-dualistic egalitarian society in which men and women are treated at par.

According to the ecofeminists, a sustainable economy is based on a creative Nature which is renewed and replenished through the proper management of ecological cycles. Such an economy may be established by women therefore, since women best understands Nature, both being *'producers of life.'* They are of the opinion that work and wealth based on the feminine principle are rooted in stability and sustainability.

Challenges Encountered

In spite of being a full-fledged and concerted movement working towards the cause of women as well as the environment, ecofeminism may be encountered with several challenges particularly in a patriarchal social set-up in which women are reduced to mere bread-makers rather than being considered breadwinners and often their role is confined to the domestic chores. In many instances they are deprived of formal education that acts as a barrier to knowledge building due to which they are not even aware of their rights. In fact, even if we talk of women empowerment, there is a thin line of difference between women empowerment and autonomy in which women are also involved in decision-making.



Hence, the ecofeminists have come forward with certain measures to be adopted at the governmental level for a sustainable future. These measures involving women are to be implemented right from the grassroot to the macro level.

First and foremost, women should be involved in matters of environmental decision-making as managers, planners, implementers and evaluators of environmental projects. For this, women's access to information and education particularly in areas of science and technology and economics should be enhanced. This in turn, would boost up their knowledge, skills and opportunities to participate in any matter related to environmental decisions. Not only clean technologies should be adopted to reduce the exposure of women to identified environmental hazards be it at home, at work, or any other surroundings, but also women need to be empowered both as producers and consumers so that they may take effective environmental actions along with men at home, workplaces or communities. Hence, a participatory approach involving local communities needs to be adopted and this should be integrated with the gender perspective while designing and implementing production techniques, infrastructure development as well as an environmentally sound sustainable resource management mechanism both in rural and urban areas. At the same time, social, political, economic and scientific institutions need to be streamlined in order to address environmental issues and their resultant impact on women. Finally, well within the framework and in consistence with national and international legislations, innovations and practices of women belonging to indigenous communities relating to traditional medicines, biodiversity and even technologies should be respected and maintained in an ecologically sustainable manner along with promoting their wider applications.

Conclusion

Ecofeminism essentially locates women and Nature as a source of life and wealth to create and maintain life. Though sometimes criticized for being over idealistic and focusing too much on a mystical connection between Nature and women, yet the measures suggested by it if implemented properly may pave the way for a new dimension of development that is more inclusive and sustainable.



The potentiality of this revolutionary 'ecosophy' consists of challenges to those processes and systems that threatens life and leads to maldevelopment.

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