

"Earth and Equality: Ecofeminist Perspectives from the Central Himalayas of Uttarakhand"

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Abstract: Feminism is an ideological movement that aims to respect women's experiences, identities, knowledge, and powers and to make all women realise their full rights, which are gradually being assimilated even among the women of the third world. The new ideological term eco-feminism is an insight that emerged in the 1970-1980s in European countries, and is emerging all over the world as an ideological movement, as a powerful movement taking nature and the exploitation of women in parallel. Ecofeminism is an ecological critique of feminism. It opposes the patriarchal system that is based on the exploitation of women and the environment. It is a response to all the ideological dualities of nature being subservient to culture and woman being subservient to men. This paper is an attempt to explore the co-relationships, oppression and ideological responses of women's ecology in the central Himalayas, especially in Uttarakhand, and also to explore new dimensions of Eco feminine.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, *Eco-democracy, Marginalised groups, Gender-environment dialogues, Uttarakhand.*

Introduction

The relationship between women and the environment is implied by the word ecofeminism. Despite being a powerful ideological movement, it has political ties as well. It connects environmental research with studies on women's equality. Ecofeminism is the term used to

describe forms of oppression connected to the environmental and social exploitation of women. The capitalist and patriarchal structures are held accountable for this by the ecofeminist worldview. Ecofeminism exposes the connection between the environment and the oppression and exploitation of women. It presents a vision of sustainable development in the future that reconciles environmental and moral principles. Ecofeminist analysis, speaking from the edges, reveals many of the neoclassical economics' presumptions to be anti-ecological and gender biased.

Ecofeminism, also known as ecological feminism. Ecofeminism reconsiders gender equality, fundamental feminist ideals, and non-patriarchal or non-linear structures. Environmentalism was unconcerned with gender inequities, and feminism was unconcerned with ecological research. While ecofeminism's philosophy has linked environmentalism to gender inequities, it has also attempted to analyse feminism via an ecological lens. Ecofeminism holds that the four interrelated pillars of patriarchal society are environmental damage, class exploitation, racism, and sexism.

The connectedness of ecofeminism ensures that no one falls behind. Ecofeminists think that everyone is equal, regardless of ethnicity, citizenship, social standing, gender, or sexual orientation. Ecofeminism advocates for the abolition of hierarchy because mankind will only stop damaging its sole habitat once it has unlearned oppression and dominance. Because of their shared qualities of fertility, passivity, and nurturing, the ecofeminist movement views women and environment as essentially similar. This movement has various sub-branches, such as materialist ecofeminism, vegetarian ecofeminism, and spiritual ecofeminism. Essentially, though, they're all saying that the dominance of men has caused a rift between culture and environment, harming both nature and marginalised people. Since all living things are creative, intelligent, and productive, ecofeminism is an integral aspect of Earth Democracy. because women have maintained the care and wellbeing economy.that treating the earth and women with violence is unacceptable because we are all members of the same family, the earth. that the earth calls on both men and women to participate in the work necessary for society's and the planet's well-being.

The term ecofeminism-

The name was coined by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in her 1974 book, *Le*

Féminisme ou la Mort. While she created the term, women all across the world have been protecting the planet's rights before and after the book. In this movement since its beginning, women have been major figures such as Carolyn Merchant, author of *Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, and Vandana Shiva, founder of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology, and Ecology. To mention a few, some more notable names are Susan Griffin, Greta Gaard, and Val Blumwood. From the 1970s to the late 1980s, ecofeminism became a dominant paradigm to analyze and respond to environmental issues globally. Women's empowerment and environmental protection are the two main goals of ecofeminism, which is both an ideology and a movement. By highlighting the role that women play in both conserving the environment and improving human relations with it, the concept is a special fusion of ecology and feminism that seeks to safeguard the natural environment.

After being left behind, the indigenous people discover a sense of unity with the natural world. Women and the natural world are pushed to the bottom of the social hierarchy because their independence is sacrificed to satisfy the demands of the upper classes. The non-Aboriginal landlords who wish to assert their hegemony force them to cede their property and submit to their cunning and merciless ways. Ecofeminism is based on many ideas of people who are frequently either ignored or undervalued in dominant discourses, as feminist philosopher Karen Warren makes clear. With regard to the marginalisation and dominance of women and nature, it seeks to offer a worldwide perspective.

Ecofeminism as a practical movement combats the environmental degradation caused by patriarchal societies, multinational corporations and global capitalism (Gaard & Murphy, 1998, p. 296).

Ecofeminism's principles are:

According to Sarah Regan-

- ❖ There is a causal link between the oppression of marginalised communities and the subjugation of nature- Patriarchal dominance leads to the devaluation of nature, the marginalisation of categories like women and children, and racial discrimination. The devaluation of nature is one of the many traits connected with femininity that capitalism fosters because it places a high priority on productivity.

- ❖ An ethic of care, or a moral philosophy based on the nurturing and caring traits of women, is what ecofeminism calls for as a replacement for the entire patriarchal system of dominance and exploitation. This strategy emphasises acting with altruism and showing compassion for others.
- ❖ All forms of oppression are unacceptable according to ecofeminism. To be comprehensive, environmentalism must take into account all individuals. Women, people of colour, and the LGBTQ community all confront unique difficulties—and when these concerns intersect, their consequences become amplified. The more marginalised a community or group is in society, the more likely it will be the first to face the negative consequences of environmental degradation.
- ❖ Ecofeminism argues that in order to have a real, positive impact on both environmental degradation and marginalised people' oppression, we must first grasp their connections to patriarchal society.

Ecofeminism in india

In matrilineal communities, women and environment are revered, and ancient Indian literature attest to this relationship. But in order to meet their requirements, India's patriarchal society during the colonial and post-colonial eras neglected both women and the natural world. Because of the growing hegemonic patriarchal power, a culture that had previously held women in high regard started to oppress and marginalise them. Ecofeminists argue that underdevelopment affects all marginalised groups, including women, Third World people, farmers, and tribal people. We must also recognise, though, that these groups play an essential role in preserving traditional knowledge. Recognising that men in these communities are more than just victims of advancement is crucial. People on the margins have the power to act, to resist exploitation, and to combat the injustices that misogyny has fuelled. A change in our thinking and methods is required to encourage the development of a new intellectual ecological framework. The Chipko movement and Narmada Bachao Andolan, two of India's most well-known environmental initiatives, demonstrate the importance of the concept of ecofeminism. Women's contributions to these movements are invaluable, and they are regarded as ecofeminist because two of the participants'

main priorities were protecting the environment and nature and making sure that women had social justice and economic equality.

Several thinkers and groups in India have been founded by women to safeguard nature and the environment. Famous Indian ecofeminist theorists include Vandana Shiva, Bina Agarwal, and Vrinda Karart. They acknowledge that in patriarchy, women and the environment are both subjected to males. Vandana Shiva is regarded as India's ecofeminist discourse pioneer. Along with challenging the model's essentialism and blindness to social and economic injustices, Indian feminists modified it for use in locally focused analyses of ecological concerns. The voices of the most disadvantaged populations should be given a central place in environmental initiatives, according to Indian ecofeminist socialists.

Ecofeminism and the Central Himalayas: Women, Nature, and Resistance in Uttarakhand-

There have been several environmental movements that have originated in Uttarakhand. Consider the movements of the Chipko in 1973, the Beej Bachao in the 1980s, the Raksha Sutra in 1994, or the Maiti in 1995. The Chipko Movement, Sunderlal Bahuguna, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Beej Bachao Movement, Vijay Jaddhaari, Raksha Sutra Movement, Suresh Bhai, and Maiti Movement, Kalyan Singh Rawat, are all dominated by men when it comes to leadership when discussing these environmental initiatives. The context of these movements, however, was heavily influenced by women, who were perceived as being more involved and active than males in environmental initiatives. They were undoubtedly restricted to a few publications and books if the names of Gaura Devi or other similar women appeared in these movements. As the originator of the environmental and Jan Aadhar movements, women's history has stayed lower class. The predicament of Dwij caste upper caste women is just depicted here; the study of Shudra or Shilpkar women's roles in forest movements has not even been thought of yet.

Even before ecofeminism became a global theoretical topic, Uttarakhand women had a special relationship with environment. Nature has generously blessed Uttarakhand, and worshipping nature has long been a part of life. Pre-colonial tribes in Uttarakhand lived in forests and followed a "clan-based land tenure system which provides customary rights in land, trees, forests, etc." They

had communal landholding and no sense of private property, believing that everyone owned the land, the forest, and the river.

The tribe discovers a sense of unity and belonging with nature after being abandoned. Because their independence is sacrificed to satisfy the needs of the upper ranks, women and nature are compelled to occupy the lowest positions in society's hierarchy. Due to the brutal and cunning actions of non-native landowners seeking to assert their hegemony, they are compelled to cede their property. In Uttarakhand, women are inextricably linked to the natural world, both in concept and reality. Nature is represented as the feminine principle on the one hand, and the feminine nurturing her on the other to create life and nourishment.

Chipko Movement-

Women's involvement in the chipko movement proved to be beneficial in conserving the forests as well as in bringing about a revolution for the position of women in general. Because women are responsible for daily agricultural tasks, animal care, and other aspects of life, their active engagement demonstrated the creative potential of women, and their achievements boosted their self-esteem and allowed them to examine "a subtle interplay of power and authority." The first women's movement in the Chipko movement took place on December 30, 1973, in the form of a parade led by five sisters, Shyama Devi, Indra Devi, Jethuli Devi, Jayanti Devi, and Parvati Devi, and Shyama Devi, who renewed their bycommitment not to chop trees. Chipko's first meeting.

According to Shekhar Pathak, during the Chipko movement, 50-year-old Gaura Devi, 52-year-old Manga Devi, Bali Devi, Rupsa, Bhadi, Musi, Harki Malmati, Phaguni, and others marched in the streets. She appears to have been someone who advocated for her husbands, brothers, and sons. The Chipko Movement Though the movement had its origins in the Gandhian tradition, it finally brought to light some of the strategy's flaws, including its for class and gender issues. The movement truly transcends the limitations of the Gandhian tradition and shares fundamental characteristics with feminist environmentalism.

This assertion is based on the women's modest but noteworthy efforts to address gender and class concerns during the demonstration. Women have frequently united against men and the

development effort as a whole, as seen in the Chipko movement, preferring the forest over immediate benefits. Women were more active in the Chipko movement, which is an important fact that needs to be well known. Kalavati Devi, Bachni Devi, and Sudesha Bhen were significant figures in the past. However, their names did not appear as frequently as those of the movement's males.

Anti-Tehri dam movement-

The Anti-Tehri dam movement was a continuation of the Chipko campaign. This movement, which began in 1978, arose as a result of social and cultural deterioration caused by displacement from the Bhagirathi-Bhilangana valley and the submergence of a productive region. In which women had an active role.

Raksha Sutra Movement-

ऊंचाई पर पेड़ रहेंगे, तो
नदी ग्लेशियर टिके रहेंगे,
पेड़ कटेगे तो पहाड़ टूटेगे,
बिना मौत के लोग मरेंगे,
जंगल बचेगा, देश बचेगा,
गांव-गांव खुशहाल रहेगा।

(If trees are found at a high elevation, The river glaciers will endure. Cutting down trees will cause mountains to crumble. Death is inevitable. The nation and the forest will be spared. All the villages will be content.)

Women from villages in the Bhilangana area of Tehari, such as Khwada, Bheti, Bhagun, and others, together took this Raksha Sutra Movement slogan to every people in 1994 in order to protect the trees that were being cut down. In 1997, women from the Harsil area also took to the forests. To save, an analogous creative experiment was conducted.

Save the seeds movement

Since the 1980s, Beej Bachao Andolan, also known as the "Save the Seeds Movement," has

been working in the Indian state of Uttarakhand to restore traditional agroecological farming knowledge, methods, and seed diversity. These have been vanishing since the 1960s, when the "Green Revolution" began. Farmer and activist Vijay Jardhari is in charge of the effort. Madhu Jardhari, Jardhari's daughter-in-law and a farmer from Jardhar Gaon, stated that women continue to be the primary producers of food and agriculture in Uttarakhand. Our families are supported by the at least twelve types of grains and lentils that we farm. With a few exceptions, such as ploughing with bulls, women primarily work in farming. Madhu asserted that although women may not actively participate in any initiatives, they had a superior understanding of natural farming methods.

Maiti Movement

Maiti Andolan is a green movement that has not only brought about a "massive ecological turnaround" in the central Himalayan area (Uttarakhand). Uttaranchal's Maiti movement is a distinctive grassroots forestry initiative. For a married woman's parental residence, Maiti is derived from Mait, Kumaoni. A tree is planted by the bride and groom as part of the marriage ceremony. A self-sustaining communal asset, these Maiti groves are maintained by Maiti behene, or unmarried village females. It is a common practice to plant maiti trees on other joyous occasions. A novel custom of a newlywed couple planting a sapling is part of the women-centric movement.

Along with eliminating some of the petty customs that were prevalent in the hill civilization of Uttarakhand, this innovative program has also sparked a green consciousness among the residents. "It is noteworthy that the movement, which began in 1995 in the small village of Gwaldam in the picturesque Garhwal hills, has also proven to be beneficial for girls from low-income families as it helps generate funds for their marriage," says Dr. Kalyan Singh Rawat, the Maiti Andolan's founder. His wife, Manju Rawat, planted two papaya trees on their second wedding anniversary in 1982, which gave him the concept for Maiti', but he was unable to carry it out at the time. In 1987, Uttarkashi experienced a severe drought. Under such circumstances, they planned a tree consecration ceremony fair.

Conversation:

Important Aspects of Uttarakhand's Ecofeminism Since 2000

1. Advocacy for Forest Rights at the Grassroots:

Women have been instrumental in promoting forest conservation because they recognise how vital it is to their livelihoods. (-) Against policies that jeopardise local rights, groups like the Van Panchayat Sangharsh Samiti have advocated for community governance over forest resources.

2. Managing Climate Change and Sustainable Livelihoods:

Uttarakhand women have successfully mobilised in response to climate change issues, such as glacial retreat, erratic rainfall, and decreased agricultural output. (-) In order to ensure food sovereignty and preserve ecological integrity, women's organisations are leading initiatives like the creation of traditional seed banks and the encouragement of organic farming.

3. Resistance to Unsustainable Development:

Women have been vocal in their opposition to major infrastructure projects that endanger ecosystems and force local inhabitants to relocate, like as hydropower dams on the Ganga and its tributaries. An example of the continuous ecofeminist criticism of exploitative and patriarchal development methods is the opposition to projects such as the Tehri Dam.

The development of renewable energy sources

such solar energy, has been given top priority by initiatives headed by women in order to reduce dependency on firewood and slow down deforestation.

4. Assistance to the Community Based Tourism:

Community-based ecotourism has grown as a result of ecofeminism, which not only gives women economic power but also encourages environmental stewardship.

5. Gender Justice and Environmental Justice Integration:

Groups and grassroots initiatives, including Vandana Shiva's Navdanya Movement, have brought attention to the connection between gender inequality and environmental degradation. Programs aim to support sustainable practices and strengthen women's roles as biodiversity guardians.

6. Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Preservation:

A key component of ecofeminism in Uttarakhand is the preservation of indigenous knowledge systems and cultures, especially those pertaining to biodiversity and sustainable agriculture. A Since women are frequently the keepers of traditional ecological knowledge, their participation in conservation initiatives maintains cultural heritage and advances environmental sustainability.

7. Initiatives for Health and Well-Being:

Women's organisations have started initiatives that combine community health and environmental health. This includes initiatives to promote clean water and sanitation as well as efforts against pollution. There is now more support for safer and cleaner living conditions as a result of the realisation that environmental deterioration disproportionately impacts the health of women.

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9. Solidarity and Networking:

In Uttarakhand, ecofeminist groups have empowered women from many communities to form networks of solidarity, establishing a unified voice for environmental justice. Local initiatives have

been reinforced by partnerships with national and international organisations, which have also provided platforms and resources for campaigning on a broader scale.

10. Legal Frameworks and Policy Advocacy:

Women's organisations have taken part in policy advocacy to support national and local laws pertaining to women's rights and environmental preservation. A Women's views are heard in conversations about conservation and resource management techniques thanks to efforts to incorporate gender perspectives into environmental legislation.

11. Developing Resilience and Adaptation Techniques:

In Uttarakhand, women have created resilience-building tactics that combine conventional methods with contemporary approaches in response to environmental challenges. These tactics include promoting agroecological methods that improve biodiversity and food security, conserving water, and implementing community-led reforestation initiatives.

"Himalayan Harmony: Ecofeminism and Sustainable Practices in Uttarakhand"

Uttarakhand's unique terrain, socioeconomic circumstances, and dependence on natural resources all have a major impact on the environment and the lives of women there. The following examples highlight the several ways that the environment affects women in this area:

1. Increased vulnerability due to climate change and natural disasters:

Women, especially those living in rural areas, face several obstacles as a result of the growing occurrence of climate-exacerbated natural catastrophes such floods, landslides, and cloudbursts.

Impact on livelihoods: Numerous women rely on agriculture as a source of income, and unpredictable weather patterns have a negative impact on agricultural yields, creating economic instability.

2. Water Scarcity –

Water Collection Responsibilities: Women are usually in charge of finding water for household use. Their duty has increased due to the loss of water resources caused by environmental degradation and deforestation, which has made longer trips necessary.

Consequences for health:

Women in particular may suffer from the physical strain of carrying large water loads over long distances.

3. Forest Degradation and Deforestation:

Many women rely on forests for important supplies like feed and fuelwood. These supplies have become more scarce due to increased deforestation, which has made their everyday struggles worse. Decreased time for other productive or leisure pursuits: The work of collecting fuelwood and feed has grown more time-consuming and labour-intensive.

4. Migration and Male Outmigration-

Feminization of Agriculture:

As a result of men moving to cities in pursuit of jobs, women are now sharing the responsibility of running both households and farms, which adds to their labour.

Social and economic pressures:

Without male family members, women may feel alone, unsupported, and under more obligation to provide for their families.

5. Geographical barriers to healthcare and education access: Access to healthcare facilities and educational institutions is severely hampered by the isolated and steep terrain.

Conclusion & Recommendations:

Since the turn of the millennium, ecofeminism in Uttarakhand has highlighted the link between gender equality and environmental conservation. Women have led initiatives to address ecological issues, empower local populations, and promote sustainable economic practices, establishing themselves as crucial agents of change. The movement achieves its objectives through

advocacy for policy reform, the safeguarding of cultural heritage, and grassroots activism. However, new obstacles have arisen, showing how environmental and gender issues can be exploited in the name of progress, thereby sustaining systemic inequalities. The widespread exploitation of natural resources for profit exacerbates environmental deterioration and further marginalizes vulnerable communities. This scenario, rooted in prevailing power imbalances, calls for a comprehensive analysis of the complex interactions among environmental, economic, and social factors.

The presence of patriarchal systems, as well as the influence of prominent business elites, are visible in this context, albeit often disguised as advancement. These elites' economic activities, while portraying themselves as significant consumers and contributors to progress, frequently obscure the persistence of systemic injustices affecting marginalized populations, particularly women. The exploitation of resources and the resulting economic disparities have received insufficient critical scrutiny. Marginalized groups, particularly women, bear the brunt of the consequences of environmental degradation and economic marginalization, but their stories are largely ignored in mainstream debates. This neglect exacerbates existing disparities and impedes efforts to build a more inclusive and equitable society.

Uttarakhand, a state in northern India, is characterized by a deeply rooted patriarchal cultural system that shapes societal roles and expectations. Despite official claims of gender equality, women have historically played an indispensable role in the state's economy, especially in rural areas. Women have been primarily responsible for agricultural production, livestock management and a wide range of household responsibilities, all of which contribute significantly to local economies and food security. However, these contributions remain undervalued and women's work is often unrecognized. Women's work is often considered "unpaid" or "informal", yet their work is essential to the functioning of the economy and the maintenance of local communities. However, the economic value and social importance of this work is often overlooked and continues to be overshadowed by patriarchal structures that fail to recognize that women's contributions are crucial to the well-being of society. The efforts of women in Uttarakhand often go unrecognized due to a systematic undervaluation that labels their work as "unpaid" or "informal," even though it plays a vital role in the regional economy. This lack of acknowledgment critically affects

women's economic contributions and perpetuates existing gender power imbalances. Furthermore, the combination of environmental degradation and gendered labor adds additional layers of difficulty. In rural Uttarakhand, women are often responsible for dealing with the adverse effects of resource depletion, ecological damage, and environmental pollution. These responsibilities fall upon women, who, while contending with a patriarchal social structure, also encounter restricted access to decision-making authority and resources that could help alleviate these issues..

Given the urgent need to address these multifaceted issues, it is essential to cultivate a more inclusive and intersectional dialogue that amplifies the voices and experiences of women and marginalized communities. A critical examination of the intersections between gender, environmental degradation, and economic systems is necessary to develop strategies for promoting a more just and sustainable future. Scholars and activists must advocate for the dismantling of patriarchal structures, the recognition of the value of women's labor, and the implementation of policies that promote social and economic equity. Only through these efforts can we hope to foster a society that genuinely acknowledges and values the contributions of all its members, while ensuring long-term environmental and social sustainability. To strengthen ecofeminism in Uttarakhand, several key steps can be taken. First, creating platforms for gender-environment dialogues will facilitate discussions among women from diverse backgrounds, fostering collaboration and networking. Second, education and awareness campaigns on ecofeminism and gender-sensitive environmental policies should be implemented in local schools, community centers, and women's groups to increase knowledge about environmental conservation and gender equity. Third, emphasizing women's leadership in environmental movements through training and resources is essential for positioning women at the forefront of these initiatives. Lastly, inclusive policy design focused on gender and ecofeminist principles must ensure women have a stake in environmental policies and access to resources. By addressing these aspects, Uttarakhand can cultivate a robust ecofeminist movement that empowers women while promoting environmental sustainability and social equity. Ecofeminism explores the interconnectedness of women's oppression and environmental degradation, particularly within Uttarakhand, India, emphasizing patriarchal exploitation for profit. Women, especially indigenous ones, are pivotal in managing biodiversity and natural resources, yet their roles are often overlooked in policy-making. Given

their dependence on forests and land, ecofeminist frameworks must recognize women's contributions to sustainable resource management while securing their livelihoods without environmental harm. Additionally, rural women disproportionately suffer from climate change impacts, warranting policies that promote gender and environmental justice. Future strategies should encompass gender-sensitive environmental policies, sustainable agriculture training, inclusive climate action, integration of indigenous knowledge, and promotion of eco-tourism, thereby fostering a sustainable, equitable future that honors both environmental integrity and women's rights in Uttarakhand.

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