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E-mail: [editor@iaeme.com](mailto:editor@iaeme.com), [iaemedu@gmail.com](mailto:iaemedu@gmail.com) Website: [www.iaeme.com](http://www.iaeme.com) Mobile: +91-9884798314

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# LITERARY STRUGGLE IN THE ERA OF ECO-FEMINISM: A STUDY ON WOMEN AND NATURE WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF VAL PLUMWOOD AND SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

**Dr. Dipti Ranjan Maharana<sup>1</sup>, Ms. Saraswati Murmu<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Department of English, Ravenshaw University, Cuttack, Odisha, India.

<sup>2</sup>Department of English, Ravenshaw University, Cuttack, Odisha, India.

## ABSTRACT

*Ecofeminism suggests that women have a very close relationship with the Nature than the Men. This connection leads to a greater sense of care and nurturing towards the environment among women. Many women, especially those in the academic fields of biological sciences have distanced themselves from ecofeminism, as they fear that discussions about Goddesses and life-forces could endanger their hard-earned yet fragile professional reputations. The contribution of ecofeminism to feminist environmentalism are huge and ecofeminism remains a significant component of the feminist environmental discourse. Ecofeminists argue that a male-centric culture thrives on sexism, racism, class exploitation and environmental degradation. Worldwide, ecofeminists protest against the exploitation of both women and the natural world. Ecofeminism urges both women and men to reimagine the world in non-hierarchical terms. In this regard, the feminist and environmental movements are seen*

*as collaborative, based on the idea that they advocate for egalitarian and non-hierarchical systems. The liberation of women and the natural environment is viewed as deeply interconnected. Historically, there is substantial evidence of women's subordinate status. Ecofeminists argue that a more effective ethical approach to nature would involve moving away from placing rights at the forefront. Instead, emphasizing less separate moral concepts like respect, sympathy, care, compassion, gratitude, friendship and responsibility. The paper reveals ecofeminism described in various ways: as a political ideology, a spiritual affirmation for women, a source of inspiration for activism, a revival of womanist earth wisdom, a feminist rebellion within radical environmentalism and a re-evaluation of women's connections to place and ecology. The term ecofeminism often promote strong responses that leads to quick division into "for" or "against" groups. The umbrella term "Ecofeminism" harnesses the energy from the feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, redirecting it towards analyzing and dismantling the methods used to oppress both human and non-human entities under patriarchal influence and subsequently advocating for change.*

**Keywords:** feminism, women, nature, ecology, culture, protest, liberation.

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## 1. Introduction

Ecofeminists argue that environmental degradation, class exploitation, racism and sexism are considered as stem of a society dominated by men. Ecofeminists globally oppose the exploitation of both women and nature. We believed that the dominant male perspective in literary and environmental writing was closely linked to the state of our environment during that period. The ideas inherent by ecofeminist philosophy are deeply connected to these types of relationships. According to this perspective, the feminist and environmental movements unite because they both advocate for egalitarian and non-hierarchical frameworks. Ecofeminism encourages both women and men to reconsider the world through a non-

hierarchical lens. In fact, it is proposed that the emancipation of women is intimately tied to the liberation of nature.

Understanding the relationship between ecofeminism, women and nature requires acknowledging our many differences, as feminists represent a wide range of identities. It is important to create an ecofeminist space that does not focus on wealthy, able-bodied, heterosexual white women but instead includes diverse perspectives. The root of the oppression we observe lies in the socially constructed importance of differences that should not define us. Ecofeminism should not prioritize individuals based on specific identities and it recognizes that just as women face oppression, the environment also suffers from its separation from humanity and culture.

Distinct identities experience various oppressions, which ecofeminists seek to address by amplifying marginalized voices. Noel Sturgeon notes that discussions are often led by more privileged groups, undermining the activism of women of color and poor women.

The main argument is that ecofeminist talks should consider how more privileged voices can overpower discussions about ecofeminism. Ecofeminism looks at both sexism and anthropocentrism, requiring an intersectional approach. This intersectionality is a key strength of the movement. Women's experiences with oppression help them connect more with nature and nonhuman beings. Recognizing our differences shapes our views, leading to discussions on femininity and a perceived stronger bond between women and nature compared to men. The conversation will then shift to how this relationship with nature influences our actions.

## **2. Objectives of the Study:**

Ecofeminism points out that the domination of women and the exploitation of natural resources are linked through patriarchal structures. The paper seeks to explore how literary texts depicts this struggle, revealing the connections between ecofeminism and resistance against both gender-based and environmental exploitation. The main objectives of the study are:

- To analyze the representation of women and nature in selected literary works through an ecofeminist lens.
- To identify and critique the various forms of resistance portrayed by female characters against environmental degradation and patriarchal oppression.
- To contribute to the discourse on ecofeminism by highlighting literary expressions of this struggle and the implications for social activism.
- To explore the intersectionality of race, class and gender within ecofeminist literature.

## 2.1 Hypothesis:

The paper discusses a study that combines qualitative and quantitative literary analysis with ecofeminist views. It focuses on themes, character development and story structures that show the link between struggles against patriarchal systems and environmental harm. The study reviews ecofeminism, including key theories and critiques and examines literary works that address ecofeminist themes and resistance. The expected outcomes are a deeper understanding of the connection between gender oppression and environmental damage, insights into literary resistance and contributions to ecofeminist literary criticism relevant to modern social movements.

## 3. Review of Literature:

Men often struggle to connect with the domination over nature compared to women, which affects their environmental empathy. Even committed environmentalists like Aldo Leopold, who created the Land Ethic, have promoted patriarchal views about nature. Leopold encourages people to change how they relate to the land and its creatures, moving from an anthropocentric view to an eco-centric one. Many feminists agree with his ideas but believe the Land Ethic does not fully address how domination affects culture in diverse ways beyond just male control over nature.

Chaone Mallory critiques Leopold by pointing out his love for hunting, which she believes contradicts environmental ethics. She asserts that hunting requires viewing animals as inferior to justify prioritizing human desires over their needs. If hunting were strictly for survival, it might be understood differently; however, Leopold hunted for sport. Ecofeminists see a contradiction in advocating for a nature-focused perspective while choosing to hunt for enjoyment or to assert power over nature. Leopold's patriarchal mind-set prevents him from understanding the problems associated with defining relationships in terms of predator and prey.

There is a clear difference between how a patriarchal society views interactions among beings and how feminists, especially ecofeminists, perceive these relationships. Patriarchy often emphasizes hierarchy and domination, believing that differences necessitate control over others. In contrast, ecofeminists argue that true power can exist without exerting dominance over humans or nature. They believe that shifting to a non-hierarchical way of interacting does not decrease our power but changes how it is expressed. Many ecofeminists feel that hierarchy becomes irrelevant when we acknowledge our deep connections to nature. John Seed highlights

this by saying that instead of seeing ourselves as separate from the rainforest, we realize we are part of it. Recognizing this interconnectedness makes it clear that we depend on nature, like needing plants for oxygen. It also suggests that we are all parts of a larger system of life, which encourages us to care for one another.

Being in nature helps many people feel a deep bond with it but understanding this connection can be difficult. Leopold's writings show that his bond during a hunting trip does not align with the connection we desire. An ecofeminist relationship with the earth needs a balance that does not depend on power over nature. Hunting creates hierarchies, so we should ask what a different connection to the earth would look like. Thoreau encourages readers to think about their life in nature and to engage with the world through touch and presence. He asks us to reflect on our identity and place in nature.

Thoreau encourages us to notice the aspects of the natural world that we typically take for granted. Experiencing "matter" is such a fundamental phenomenon that we rarely contemplate it with a sense of wonder or reverence. The same applies to "rocks, trees and the wind on our cheeks". These are elements we can interact with without a second thought. However, for Thoreau, our capacity to engage with "the tangible world" is not something we should overlook. When Thoreau discusses "the actual world", he is alluding to the reality of the world as it exists, independent of the human values we attach to it. Having the kind of connection that Thoreau finds worth celebrating is a significant experience. Rocks and trees are not simply random elements scattered throughout our environment; rather, they serve as a foundation for engaging with something larger than ourselves, something that encourages us to ponder the existential questions Thoreau addresses by the conclusion of the passage. He articulates the sensation we experience during moments of profound connection. It seems likely that particular experiences could awaken our appreciation for the wonders of nature, especially for those of us who do not spend a great deal of time in outdoor settings and natural surroundings.

Consider a moment when you embarked on an unusually long hike, leaving you completely fatigued. Yet then something occurs: the sun begins to rise or you arrive at the mountain's summit and you may find yourself feeling overwhelmed, akin to Thoreau's experience in this passage. Alternatively, you might be discovering a unique area of nature that you have never encountered before. Perhaps you have never ventured into the depths of a cave or witnessed a vast canyon first-hand. There are specific instances during our interactions with nature when, for various reasons, we are suddenly filled with awe, gratitude or wonder about

what we are experiencing. Don't these extraordinary moments seem to affect us in ways that lead us to reflect on our identity and place, as Thoreau describes? Are these experiences somehow universal or does nature only inspire this response in certain individuals? We could also consider whether these moments of deep connection feel different for women who align with ecofeminist ideals. It appears that relating to nature through a patriarchal lens hinders one's ability to forge such a connection.

The challenge is to change our view of nature to see it with humility and respect, rather than control or idealization. Ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood offers insights but not specific steps. We can reflect on what this reverence means and start to practice it, even if we do so imperfectly.

The central concept here is the "oneness" that Gebara mentions. When we "honor the earth" in a manner that is intrinsically linked to honoring ourselves, we can achieve this without risking idealization. We acknowledge ourselves as a vital part of the broader natural world to which we are intimately connected. Our acknowledgment of nature in this specific reverent manner is influenced by our comprehension of our relationship with the natural world. This understanding is crucial for our philosophical perspective on our individual and collective ties to our surroundings as well as fostering tangible, positive effects on our environmentally-friendly actions.

#### **4. Women and Nature in Ecofeminism: A Detailed Analysis**

##### **1. Self or Nature Connection in Addressing Gender and Ecological Issues**

Ecofeminists believe there is a link between how women are treated and how nature is treated. They suggest that if people recognize their connection to nature, they might become better environmentalists, understanding that nature is part of who they are. A genuine bond between ecofeminist women and the natural world, based on real connection rather than just shared oppression, could make them stronger feminists and environmental supporters. This relationship goes both ways. Research by Holloway et al. showed that female graduate students who spent time in nature together developed a deeper bond with the environment that also enhanced their relationships with other women, especially their mothers. Realizing this specific connection to the earth could help foster stronger, more meaningful relationships with the women in their lives.

The sides of gender inequality not only clearly illustrate the detrimental effects of environmental degradation on women but they also clarify the lack of attention given to

women's perspectives, even within the newly established village institutions for environmental conservation. Women spend more time and effort on collecting fuel and fodder due to the existing gender division of labor. Their dependence on common property resources has significantly risen because they do not own private land. Furthermore, since they are underrepresented in public decision-making bodies, they tend to be beneficiaries rather than innovators of the rules and regulations that influence natural resource management. Ecofeminists argue that shifting the concept of rights away from its current prominence and focusing on less dualistic moral ideas such as respect, sympathy, care, concern, compassion, gratitude, friendliness and responsibility would be a more fruitful way to approach an ethics concerning nature. The literature provide various definitions of ecofeminism, which include: a spiritual affirmation from a feminist perspective, a political viewpoint, a grassroots movement, an encouragement for women's activism, a feminist theoretical framework, a revival of womanist earth wisdom, a feminist challenge within radical environmentalism and a redefinition of women's relationship with place and ecology.

The term "ecofeminism" often elicits strong emotions and leads to the formation of divided camps of "for" or "against". The strong link between ecofeminist ideas and womanist spirituality is the perceived essentialism inherent in the ecofeminist embrace of a meaningful connection to nature and the historical. This divide between the theoretical work and the perceived innocence of activist practices which are the main issues causing statement between ecofeminism theorists and their opponents.

## **2. The Tension between Feminist Ideas and Environmental Connection**

The text discusses the debate about the connection between women and nature. Some feminists believe this connection is a social construct that serves to uphold oppression. In contrast, "nature feminists" or ecofeminists argue that women have a natural bond with the environment, which does not have to be seen as disempowering. They claim that both women and nature are vital sources of life and women may experience nature's effects more deeply than men, influenced by factors like the moon. This debate is categorized into "spiritual ecofeminism", which supports a positive view of the connection and "social ecofeminism", which sees it as purely socially constructed.

Spiritual ecofeminists believe humans have a deep connection to nature, especially women. However, some ecofeminists argue that linking nature to femininity is harmful to both women and environmental efforts. They claim this view has historically justified damage to the environment and raises questions about the consequences of seeing nature as a mother



figure. Some ecofeminists counter that many indigenous cultures have a strong respect for nature, viewing it through a divine feminine lens. Theresa, an Anishinabek elder, notes that women inherit the ability to nurture life from “Mother Earth”, suggesting that this connection promotes respect for nature. While framing nature as feminine can sometimes lead to exploitation, in some cultural contexts, it inspires care and respect for the environment.

### **3. Nature in Feminine Literature and the Search for Universal Understanding**

Many women who see themselves as ecofeminists connect their experiences of domination and oppression with the natural environment. Different feminists have various views on nature and culture, as noted by Linda Vance, who observes that many liberal feminists reject nature and align with culture due to the power it holds. Many feminists seek to dismiss the idea of a natural link between women and nature because it has often led to oppression. They argue that women engage in culture as much as men do.

Some feminists believe that women can connect deeply with the universe through nature, such as stars, seas and mountains. Gebara argues that recognizing our connection to the natural world helps us see ourselves as part of a larger environment. She presents an ecofeminist view suggesting we can live in harmony with all forms of life and cosmic energies. This spiritual understanding of nature is not limited to specific religions; it can also be found in many faith traditions. For example, Karen Baker-Fletcher discusses the sacred Earth in Genesis, indicating that life emerged from a loving creative force, allowing ecosystems to thrive where humans can live. This idea aligns with themes in nature-focused religious practices.

The connection to nature also goes beyond spiritual aspects. Scientific studies have looked into how humans experience nature. Andrew Howell and his colleagues found that feeling connected to nature enhances one’s sense of being alive and contributes to finding purpose in life. They explain that nature can give us feelings of meaning and happiness. When we feel linked to the natural world, it can lead us to a greater understanding of existence. This connection with nature and other living beings enriches our lives, bringing us joy and meaning. Overall, both spiritual beliefs and scientific insights highlight the importance of our relationship with nature in adding depth to our lives.

### **4. Women’s Perspectives on Nature as a Source of Connection and Meaning**

To understand the sense of connection to nature among women, Kathi Wilson interviewed indigenous Anishinabek women in Canada. She focused on the relationship between women and nature, suggesting that listening to Aboriginal voices can deepen our understanding of these connections. One interviewee, Theresa, shared that her bond with nature

is rooted in her belief that “the Creator” has blessed both nature and women with life. For her and others, this connection is essential to their spiritual beliefs and identity.

Wilson found that Anishinabek women commonly view the land as a female entity, referring to it as Shkagamik-Kwe or Mother Earth. They believe this sacred feminine nature of the earth is vital to understanding their relationship with the natural world. This perspective encourages them to appreciate and care for nature rather than exploit it, recognizing that the earth provides all necessary resources for life.

Spiritual ecofeminists see nature as a key part of their spiritual experiences. Women from various backgrounds express spirituality that honors nature as sacred, even if their practices aren’t directly tied to it. Many find that being in nature helps, they connect with the divine.

How individuals view nature can greatly impact their lifestyles. Research shows that feeling connected to nature often predicts environmentally responsible behaviors. When people see themselves as part of the natural world, they are less likely to harm it and develop empathy for the environment. This connection influences women’s choices, encouraging them to favour eco-friendly actions driven by emotional ties rather than mere intellectual understanding. The bond to nature can lead to both intentional environmental behavior and spontaneous actions for the environment, suggesting that this connection is both mental and deeply emotional.

For some women, connecting with nature brings deep personal benefits rather than just practical ones. Judith A. Holloway and others studied women in a nature course who changed how they saw both their peers and the natural world. After spending time in nature together, these women shifted their focus from technology to traditional practices that honor nature. This change was especially important for women who felt a generational gap with older family members. One example is an American-born woman of Chinese descent who found that her experiences in nature helped her appreciate her cultural ties and improved her relationship with her immigrant mother.

When we try to connect with nature, it changes how we view the world. A genuine relationship with nature leads us to see its value beyond human use. Linda Vance emphasizes that we should protect wild places, not just for tourists but because they resonate with our own lives. This idea suggests that humans can relate to natural things like rivers and forests. Nancy Howell argues that if we change how we value nature, it will change our relationships with it. By adopting an ecofeminist view that emphasizes connection, we can foster greater respect for the earth.

Building this respect is essential for a transformative feminist environmental ethic. Vance points out that ecological studies often overlook the magical aspects of nature, which are important to many ecofeminists. They believe nature has a special and mystical quality that is often lost in our culture. These spiritual ecofeminists aim to create a meaningful bond between women and nature, celebrating the unique relationship between femininity and the earth.

- The paper discusses how our worldview affects our relationship with the environment, suggesting that viewing it as mysterious and sacred can lead to important insights. It highlights the need for balance in using Earth's resources while avoiding irreversible harm. Lori Swanson refers to Nel Noddings' idea of "An ethic built on caring", emphasizing that this caring ethic is vital for ecofeminism and should include women's perspectives. The text stresses the interconnectedness of cultural and social realities, indicating that both need to be addressed together. Lindsay Van Gelder argues that understanding the ecological crisis requires a radical transformation of the economy and achieving social liberation. She believes feminism plays a crucial role in critiquing social domination and that preventing ecological damage will need significant and radical changes to our social structures.

In the 1980s, many women revived practices that care for the earth, focusing on nature-centered traditions and honoring earth goddesses, which formed the basis of ecofeminism. Their main goal was to acknowledge women's special connection with the earth and life forces. Ecofeminism brought topics like spirituality, earth goddesses and cultural identities to feminist conversations.

The core idea of ecofeminism is that linking women to nature allows men to control both. Poranee Natadecha-Sponsel suggests that the oppression of women and nature is connected, with both being subjected to patriarchal dominance. In simple terms, the issues of women's oppression and environmental destruction stem from the same source. Some ecofeminists believe this link can be positive and empowering, while others argue that it is merely a social construct and reject the idea of an inherent connection between women and nature.

There are similarities in how women and the environment are treated and it is these linkages that prompted the development of an environmental philosophy that recognizes these parallels. Noel Sturgeon, in *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action*, delves into the origins of the ecofeminist movement and the key issues that were central

to its formation. This group of ecofeminist women sought to clarify why environmentalism and feminism are fundamentally intertwined.

Ecofeminism emerged in response to the dangers of environmental degradation as well as the risks of male violence against both nature and women. The same factors that endanger the environment have also posed threats to women. It is crucial to understand ecofeminist concerns within these contexts, which implies that any ideology we develop must prioritize preventing ecological crises and addressing male violence toward both women and nature.

## **5. Discussion and Findings:**

As this line of thought progressed within the framework of ecofeminism, an unusual omission occurred. Surprisingly, “ecofeminism” continued to be employed to describe a broad spectrum of feminist environmental ideas, even as its link to a spiritually focused school of thought became firmly established. Consequently, the term “ecofeminism” evolved into a dual signifier, representing both the specific school of environmental thought centered on spirituality and all feminist environmental movements.

This shift indicated that by the late 1980s, “ecofeminism” had become a contentious term. For every woman who celebrated the connection between ecofeminism and earth goddesses, there was another who recoiled. They were concerned that discussions surrounding goddesses and life forces would undermine their already fragile yet hard-earned professional standing. Many political feminists utilized the term “ecofeminism” to critique its spiritual aspects, which they perceived as dangerously apolitical and lacking theoretical grounding. Ecofeminism has contributed significantly to feminist environmentalism and it is clear that ecofeminism is now an integral part of the feminist environmental landscape. A rich and complex body of literature addressing anthropomorphism, the “gendering” of the planet, the interplay between feminism and deep ecology and the essence of nature has emerged from the contemplation and contestation of the issues raised by ecofeminism. The philosophy of ecofeminism is a well-established field of study.

The terms connected with “feminism” hold significant weight but “ecofeminism” represents a two political engagement: it merges environmentalism with feminism and vice versa. Regardless of whether they identify as “ecofeminist,” many feminists who advocate for environmental issues share common objectives, such as highlighting how gender, class and race inform individuals’ experiences within their communities. There is an interest in exploring how perceptions and values related to the human-environment relationship may be shaped by gender

roles and assumptions, filtered through “gendered” perspectives, in addition to understanding the gendered dynamics of the political, economic and ecological power structures in institutions that substantially affect environmental conditions, as well as the interconnectedness of oppressive and dominating systems. Recent feminist environmental education effectively tackles and expands upon transnational, postcolonial and poststructuralist critiques and challenges.

## 6. Conclusion

According to ecofeminism, women have a deeper connection to nature compared to men. This connection leads to women being more compassionate and nurturing towards the environment. Some attribute this connection to women’s biology, while others link it to cultural and historical influences. The term “ecofeminism” serves as an umbrella for social activism, harnessing the momentum of the feminist movements to explore and dismantle the ways in which patriarchal power oppresses both humans and non-human entities before advocating for change. Because we have experienced severe violence against our bodies, we are more aware of the damage inflicted upon our planet. Ecofeminists address the tension between production and reproduction. By highlighting issues and proposing solutions, women aim to counteract the detrimental effects of production on both biological and social reproduction. By envisioning and enacting alternative gender roles, career options and political practices, women challenge the conventional methods by which mainstream society perpetuates itself through socialization and politics. Our society tends to emphasize the differences that divide us rather than the powerful connections that bring us together.

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