

# A Study of Feminist Perspective on Gender and Environment

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**Abstract -** The "ecofeminist" and "materialist" categories may be used to categorize the primary feminist viewpoints for researching women and the environment. The ecofeminist movement contends that there is an "innate" link between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women, that it is the patriarchal structure of human society that fosters the exploitation of the "Other." The materialist faction disputes this assertion. In order to argue that structural and material disparities are the foundation of women's oppression, it draws on two theoretical perspectives: feminist environmentalism and feminist political ecology (FPE). The area of Gender, Environment, and Development (GED) applies some of these feminist viewpoints to the environmental policy realm, such as ecofeminism and feminist environmentalism. In this essay, the feminist political ecology has emphasized how gendered differences in resource access, control, and distribution lie at the core of many environmental challenges, including social justice and environmental degradation. Feminist history, Feminism's many forms, feminist political ecology, and a gender analysis framework.

**Keyword -** Eco-feminism, Gender and Environment.

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## INTRODUCTION

The feminist movement began with the realization that traditional gender roles in society are problematic. It seeks to liberate women by investigating the root causes and many manifestations of their oppression. Others argue that this restrictive concept of women's freedom reflects the class bias of what is variably called bourgeois feminism, career feminism, mainstream feminism, and liberal feminism.

While the word "Feminism" is often associated with negative connotations, it is possible to find both positive and innovative aspects within its definition. Feminism is a set of beliefs that holds that women face structural discrimination in today's society. Feminists fight for the same rights for women as men.

Feminists argue that the intellectual geography of our social and political life is moulded by differences in gender. It affects the kinds of thoughts we may have and how we can have them. Feminists further contend that this is because conventional political thinking employs a conceptual framework in which male-dominated perspectives are accepted as the norm, the reasonable, sensible, and right perspective for all situations.

The tendency to universalize experiences associated solely with males is seen as a key issue in mainstream western social and political discourse, according to

feminists. This implies that they make an effort to portray rites of passage traditionally associated with males as portraying aspects of human experience that are universal. In this way, feminist philosophy has progressed and shown signs of fostering the concept of unity, all while searching for reasons or even a single cause of women's oppression. The group's goal was to identify the root cause of men's oppression so that they could articulate their shared plight and combat the many factors that keep women from cooperating politically.

The women's movement in India, which promotes environmentally friendly practices including sustainable development, has gained a lot of attention recently. Sherry B. Ortner was the first person to bring up the topic of women and the environment. Compared to him, is she more like nature or culture? Identifies the consistent cultural symbolism between women with the natural world, In her 1975 articles for New Woman/New Earth, Rosemary Radford Ruether lays forth her perspective on the role of women in the natural world. Karen Varren, however, argues that the lack of a cohesive eco-feminist philosophy and unified theory of eco-feminism means that the movement offers a richly varied framework and a variety of theoretical viewpoints (Karen 1994). However, ecofeminists' standard philosophical speculations centre mostly on the connection between women and the natural world. Environmental justice, global

climate change, population disputes, catastrophes, water, and militarism are just few of the topics on which feminists are now expressing their views. I'll attempt to introduce the feminist environmentalist viewpoint organised by Sonali Sapra in the beginning (2012). Both the "ecofeminist camp" and the "materialist camp" were included in her categorization of feminism's take on sex and the natural world. She organized ecofeminist perspectives according to their conceptual links, their historical roots, and their spiritual resonances. Ecofeminism is a movement that examines the "closeness" between women and the natural world. It demonstrates the inextricable link between ecology and sexuality. Despite numerous apparent inconsistencies, ecofeminists have uncovered a system of patriarchy in human civilization that leads to the dominance of the "Other" and the subjugation of women.

Feminist ecology and Feminist Political Ecology are the two camps she identified as belonging to the materialist school (FPE). The materialist school of thought sees the source of women's oppression in structural and material inequities. They disagree with essentially feminism and instead maintain that gender norms in society are responsible for the unequal distribution of power and wealth. I have utilized a gender analysis framework to draw connections between the three main feminist political ecology methods I have been studying throughout this study.

### Origin of Feminism

Feminism has its roots in the Western culture, but it has spread and is now represented internationally by a diverse range of organizations fighting for women's rights. Feminism is the ideology that advocates for gender parity in all spheres of society, including the economy, politics, and public office. Miss Margery Fry's comments during the debates over the Oxford legislation that restricted the enrollment of women as students were motivated by a belief that women's labour has never been fully recognized for its inherent value:

"Women do their best work when they are allowed to do it, not as women, but as human beings".

It is the urge behind woman's growing demand for employment handicapped by inadequate pay or unnecessary restrictions as whether she is married or whether her husband has an income. The right to separate her public and private affairs as every man is allowed to separate his is no 'minor grievance', but the test of a fundamental distinction - the distinction between a social and an independent responsible individual.

Therefore, the driving force behind the suffrage campaign and subsequent agitations over women's equal rights is and always has been the same. It's not so much a demand for the vote, which in and of itself may be called a "small grievance" rather than a "great

old cause," as it is a desire for a satisfying response to the basic question: "should a woman be considered as a human being, and if not, why not?"

Woman has always been aware of her full humanity, and now all she asks is that others do the same.

Both Britain and the United States often place the beginning of the first wave of feminism at the middle of the nineteenth century. Traditionally, the desire for independence has been held up as the driving force for this age of feminism. Women's integration into the contemporary industrial workforce as equal citizens to males is seen as a step forward in the progression from their traditional submissive and dependent roles.

### Types of Feminism

Feminism, like other all-encompassing philosophies, has a wide variety of sub-schools. It would be impossible to make a comprehensive list in a little space. Liberal, Marxist, Psychoanalytic, Socialist, Existentialist, and Postmodernist are all recognizable in the work of feminist thinkers.

Each of these approaches has its own methodological strengths and flaws, and hence can only provide a partial and preliminary response to the woman issue. The intersection of these incomplete and temporary solutions remains fascinating. Coming together to express sorrow for the mistreatment of women throughout history and to rejoice in the numerous women who have defied stereotypes, taken control of their own lives, and inspired one another to do the same,

Most modern feminist philosophy positions itself in opposition to established ideas. When doing a broad overview of feminist thought, liberalism is a natural starting point. A Vindication of the Rights of Women by Mary Wollstonecraft and On Liberty by John Stuart Mill are the classic articulations of this view. The central argument of The Subjection of Women is that women are held back from equal participation in public life by a combination of social norms and legislation. The observation that "an s follows" is correct has been made:

"Because society has the false belief that women are, by nature, less intellectually and / or physically capable than men, it excludes women from the academy, the forum and the market place. As a result of this policy of exclusion, the true potential of many women goes unfulfilled.., gender justice, insist Liberal Feminists, and requires us, first, to make the rules of the game fair."

Marxist feminists argue that in a society structured on social classes, only the wealthy and politically powerful can achieve true equality for themselves and their families. According to Engels, the advent of private property was the catalyst for the subjugation of women since it destroyed any

semblance of equality that existed in the human society.

If women are to be freed, the capitalist system must be replaced with a socialist one in which the means of production belong to one and all. This is because the few people who have historically enjoyed private ownership of the means of production, originally all male, inaugurate a class system whose contemporary manifestations are corporate capitalism and imperialism. Women would no longer be economically reliant on males and would be on par with them under socialism.

To the radical feminist, neither the liberal nor the Marxist feminisms have gone far enough. They believe that the patriarchal system is the root of all evil since it is based on power, dominance, and rivalry and can never be mended; only destroyed. Institutions of society and culture, such as the family, the church, and the academia, as well as the legal and political systems, must be toppled.

Feminist research must be distinguished from the antifeminist thesis that women's biology is their essence and destiny. To the right-leaning audience, the phrase "biology is destiny" means:

- People are born with hormones, anatomy and chromosomes of either a male or a female.
- The reproductive burden is predetermined to fall disproportionately on women..
- Assuming all else is equal, men tend to display stereotypically masculine characteristics such as confidence, leadership, toughness, independence of spirit, and the ability to think in a rational, analytical, and emotionally in-control manner.
- Given similar environmental conditions, women are more likely to display 'feminine' characteristics such as kindness, submissiveness, modesty, humility, empathy, compassion, nurturing, sensitivity, intuition, and practicality.
- Men should be men and women should be women; society should ensure this natural order is maintained.

When compared to conservatives, this is a significant difference. It is not in the interest of radical feminists to uphold any "Natural Order" or biological position that places women behind males; rather, it is their goal to challenge the idea of a "natural order" and triumph over whatever disadvantages both sexes may have inherited through their biological make-up. Most Medical Feminists arrived to the conclusion that women's biology, particularly their reproductive abilities and the caring psychology that flows from them, may serve as potential liberating sources of power for women.

It's not that women have a biological disadvantage, but rather that males have historically dominated their role as child carriers. Accordingly, for women's liberation, each woman must make her own decisions regarding the use of reproductive technologies such as contraception, sterilization, and abortion, as well as reproductive technologies that aid conception, such as donor gamete insemination, in vitro fertilization, and contracted mother hold.

However, not all radical feminists place emphasis on biology as a primary cause of women's oppression. Nonetheless, the vast majority of attention is paid to the ways in which gender roles (masculinity and femininity) and sexual orientation (heterosexuality and lesbianism) have been exploited to keep women in the subservient position to males. Many radical feminists, like many liberal feminists, have advocated the nurture hypothesis of gender difference, which holds that differences between the sexes are largely the result of upbringing and cultural influences.

Liberal feminists, who tend to downplay the influence males, have on women and who often portray men as innocent bystanders to the harmful effects of sex role training, seek to diminish the significance of these factors. According to radical feminists, the social creation of gender is predicated on the dominance of men.

### **Feminist Political Ecology**

Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) draws from the inherently political nature and analytical themes of feminism: power and difference, and originated from political ecology's concern for social equity and social justice concerns in environmental change. Dianne Rocheleau, Barbara Thomas Slayter, and Esther Wangari, authors of the seminal 1996 book *Feminist Political Ecology: Global Issues and Local Experiences*, were the first to propose this new conceptual framework. In their presentation, they defined gendered power relations as a "key determinant in defining resource access and control interacting with class, caste, race, culture, and ethnicity to determine processes of ecological change," an area under political ecology. They also note that it incorporates lessons from feminist cultural ecology, feminist geography, and feminist political economics, and that it serves as a framework for incorporating a feminist viewpoint into political ecology. In the context of neoliberal economic development and structural adjustment trajectories, this framework allows for a multi-scalar examination of knowledge creation, gendered rights and duties, and, more specifically, the dynamics of power and politics in the allocation of resources.

Women's experiences building social movements and fighting for local environmental causes in the global South and North over a decade informed the foundation of FPE. Examples from the period

include the Love Canal Homeowners' Association in New York, the Kenyan Greenbelt Movement, the Indian Chipko Movement, the anti-toxins initiatives in Warren County, North Carolina's Cancer Alley, and the worldwide Women's Environment Development Organization (WEDO). Feminist Political Ecology mainly consisted of case studies of women's participation in collective action, demonstrating the centrality of case study and narrative research to the FPE method.

Those who have gone before us in the fields of ecofeminism and feminist environmentalism—people like Dianne Rocheleau, Barbara Thomas-Slayer, and Esther Wangari have laid the groundwork for the FPE approach via their work in three main areas:

- Gendered knowledge, or how access to scientific and ecological knowledge is structured by gender
- Gendered environmental rights and responsibilities, including differential access by men and women to various legal and de facto claims to land and resources.
- Gendered politics and grassroots activism, including an examination of women within and as leaders of environmental movements

The first theme is gendered knowledge, which, like most of the feminist environmentalist literature, investigates the ways in which males and females acquire and use information about the world's natural resources. It examines the intersections between gender, science, and the environment in the contexts of academia, politics, and daily life. They look at the gendered science of survival in both rural and urban settings to see how the separation of labour and knowledge/science and practice affects women and men differently. They note that although males are more likely to have access to agroforestry extension work and scientific knowledge, women's practical experience as primary subsistence producers gives them an advantage.

The second theme titled "gendered environmental rights and duties," delves into the many political struggles in which women are denied power and access to resources. There is a negative effect on women's de facto claims to land usage rights and control over land as a result of agricultural reforms in developing countries like India and Kenya, where land is officially handed solely to male heads of families.

The third theme considers the role of women in environmental movements by analyzing gendered environmental politics and grassroots involvement. They highlight the role women have had in shaping national and international "sustainable development" policy developments in response to environmental and economic challenges.

### Gender Analysis Frame Work

The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation developed an analytical framework covering the following categories to understand the relationship between gender and environment; this framework was slightly revised to fit sida:

- Formal and informal constraints: Rules and norms that shape the behavior of actors in society, gender relations and identities.
- Division of labour: The tasks and responsibilities that men and women are expected to fulfill in private and public arenas.
- Access to and control over resources: The resources, in a broad sense, that men and women have access to and power to decide over.

Laws and regulations are examples of formal rules, and they govern things like who may legally own property or trees or who can legally work in particular professions. Ideas on what is or is not proper for women or men may be found within the unspoken standards and guidelines that society has developed through time. In certain cultures, for instance, only specific crops are grown by women, and in many countries, women and girls are expected to collect water. Organizational and human behaviour and interactions, as well as those between organizations and the environment, are grounded on and constrained by formal and informal rules and norms. They influence how work gets done in the home and the community, and how much power women and men have over various resources. As a result, men and women experience environmental deterioration in different ways, have different demands, and make different kinds of use of resources. The relevance of gender analysis in mainstreaming gender in a sustainable development-friendly setting was also highlighted by Manimekalai and Sindhuja (2019).

### CONCLUSION

It has been underlined by the feminist political ecology that the allocation of resources, as well as their availability and management, are at the heart of many environmental problems. Consideration of gender in environmental concerns often promotes measures to reduce the disparity in impact between men and women when gender is seen as a linear or structural connection. Gender power dynamics, however, mean that their insights are often disregarded, and women are seldom credited as change makers. Therefore, it is important to do a gender analysis of environmental management, taking into account differences in how men and women access and use natural resources, buy and consumer products and services, and cope with the effects of environmental deterioration. Factors such as age, socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and location all play a role in how women and men are affected by their surroundings. Participation needs assessment, and

programme design must all take into consideration this complexity.

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