

## **‘Interconnections between Gandhi’s Environmentalism and Ecofeminism’**

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### **Introduction:**

Ecological concerns as we understand them today and the environmental problems we face today did not exist in Gandhi's time, but his criticism of modern civilization and development concepts, views on the relationship between man and nature, non-violence, simplicity, conservation of nature reveal his environmentalism. He felt that people should put limits on their material comforts which will help them to move towards the path of spirituality. Evolutionary theories do not view life from a holistic perspective. They emphasize the physical aspects and completely ignore the intellectual and spiritual dimension of life; as a result, our development policies are lopsided, truncated and distorted.

The proposed paper tries to discuss the concepts of Gandhi’s Environmentalism and Ecofeminism and tries to search for interconnections between both. However before understanding connection between two, the paper tries to flash light on Gandhian Environmentalism and Ecofeminism with their stresses.

**Scope of the study:** the paper tries to encompass the positions and stress of the Gandhi’s environmentalism and ecofeminism. Mainly tries to search for interconnections between the two.

**Methodology:** In the present paper the researcher has used descriptive and analytical method.

**Objectives of the study:** To study arguments of Gandhi’s environmentalism and Ecofeminism and find out their interconnections.

**Key terms:** Ecofeminism, environmentalism, patriarchy.

### **Gandhi’s Environmental thought:**

The environment concern was not as urgent at the time of Gandhi as we understand today. However his ideas on development, technology, self-sufficiency, village swaraj etc. disclose his environmental concern. Even we see that different streams of environmental philosophy also many environmental movements of the time are influenced by his thoughts. It is a fact that environmental problems were minimal in Gandhi’s time; but on the basis of Gandhi’s foresighted views scattered in his writings, the eminent environmentalist writers like Ramchandra Guha considers him as early environmentalist. His ideas relating to Satyagraha based on truth and non-violence, simple life style and development reveal how sustainable development is possible without doing any harm to nature and our fellow beings. His idea that has enough to satisfy every one’s need but not to satisfy anybody’s greed’ became one line ethic to modern environmentalism.

Gandhi’s views on environment consists of moral, spiritual and non-violent dimensions. He did not see development from the perspective of materialism and consumerism but spiritual self realization. His main thought can be explained in following points.

**1. Ecological Scope of non-violence:** Non-violence or non injury is the fundamental of Gandhian philosophy. It also has ecological unlimited scope. Gandhi’s faith in non-violence and

vegetarianism sport the view of conservation of all diversity including all forms of life, societies, cultures, religions, traditions.

**2. Gandhi's critique of Modern Civilisation:** Gandhi was undoubtedly a visionary who could foresee the ills of industrialization and modernization. He was an early critic of the dehumanizing character of modern industrial civilization. His *Hind Swaraj* depicts his understanding about the impact of modern civilization and the chaos which it would usher in.

**3. Man and nature Relationship:** nature according to Gandhi is a source and force of inspiration and not exploitation. He often said that man had no right to destroy life. Gandhi appealed for conservation and frugal use of nature and respect for Mother earth. In words of S. K. Jha, 'Gandhi fully understood the primordiality of man-nature relationship and his theory and philosophy of life, society and politics are in consonance with it. It is this understanding of and reverence for salience and serenity of nature for human existence which makes his an environmentalist par excellence.

**4. Voluntary Simplicity:** Gandhi warned man against making nature victim of human's greed and unlimited indulgence. He wanted men to disentangle themselves from the tentacles of the modern machine culture and opt for simple living as against materialistic comforts and luxuries. Gandhi's approach to nature revolves around the concepts of 'need' and 'greed' therefore the boundaries of nature can be used only according to our needs.

**5. Importance of nature cure:** Gandhi's brought forth a close link between nature and existence of man, he appealed for respecting the five elements of nature- earth, water, ether, sunlight and Air without which the human existence would be jeopardized.

**Ecofeminism:**

Ecofeminism is a movement that sees the connection between the exploitation and destruction of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. We can see its emergence in the middle of the 1970s with second-wave feminism and the green movement. The ecofeminist group argues that there is a 'innate' connection between the domination of men over nature and the oppression of women, and that human society has a patriarchal system that leads to the dominance of the "other". The term ecofeminism first appeared in 1971. French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne coined the term "ecofeminism" in her book 'Feminism or Death'.

In words of Mary Mellor, "Ecofeminism is a movement that sees connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. Ecofeminism brings together elements of feminist and green movements while at the same time offering a challenge to both. It takes from the green movement a concern about the impact of human activities on the non-human world and from feminism the view of humanity as gendered in ways that subordinate, exploit and oppress women."

Ecofeminism recognizes that there is connection between the subordination of women & the destruction of nature. The goal of feminist movement is to bring an end to the subordination of women. And the goal of ecological movement is to end the destruction and exploitation of nature. Thus we can see that ecofeminism is a convergence of feminist movement and ecological movement which aims at the construction of a society that does not promote the subordination of women and the destruction of nature. Further Ecofeminism is a

broad category of plurality of theoretical positions which brings under one umbrella liberal, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist and post-structural approaches. However most ecofeminist agree on several core assumptions.

**Assumptions of Ecofeminism:**

1. There are significant connections between the oppression of women and oppression of nature .
2. Ecofeminist try to understand linkages between the oppression women and nature in order to understand the oppression women and nature.
3. Feminist theory and practice must consider ecological/environmental perspectives
4. Ecology and environmental ethics must include feminist perspective.

**Arguments of Ecofeminists:**

Ecofeminism recognizes that there is connection between the subordination of women and the destruction of nature. The goal of feminist movement is to bring an end to the subordination of women. The goal of ecological movement is to end the destruction and exploitation of nature. Thus we can see that Ecofeminism is a convergence of feminist movement and ecological movement which aims at the construction of a society that does not promote the subordination of women and the destruction of nature.

Ecoconcernedwriters have contributed alarming descriptions of degraded nature and developmental hunger. The consequences of degenerating environment have been focused in writings which affect women. The Ecofeminists of the developing economies also wrote greatly on the effects of technology and development on the cultures and environments of the native people.

**Points of interconnection between Gandhi’s Environmentalism and Ecofeminism:**

1. Gandhi Modern civilization involved an atrocious amount of violence against nature, which was largely considered the property of man. It weakened the unity of man with his environment and neighbors and destroyed stable and long-lasting communities. Natural resources were exploited mercilessly and their rhythm and balance were disrupted when animals were killed or tortured for human needs. Gandhi believed that villages would soon disappear due to urbanization, which is part of modern civilization and a product of environmental degradation. While the western environmentalists spread the message of "going back to the nature" Gandhi spread the message of "going back to the villages". He believed that the "the blood of the village is the cement with which the edifice of the cities is built."

Ecofeminsim also recognizes the connection between the subordination of women and destruction of nature. And so they aspire to end the destruction and exploitation of nature. Thus we can see Gandhi and ecofeminists both aim at the construction of a society that promote egalitarian society where subordination of women and nature will end.

2. Environmental movements in India used Satyagraha as the moral equivalent of war. Forest Satyagraha was first used effectively in *Chipko* movement to protest against deforestation. Gandhian techniques like *padayatras* were conducted to save nature. Conflict resolution techniques based on non-violence and self sacrifice were used by environmental activists like Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Baba Amte, Sunderlal Bahuguna, Medha Patker and others.

3. Decades before the emergence of environmental movements, Gandhi addressed fundamental environmental issues such as overconsumption, violence against people and nature, etc. There are many movements around the world that fight against environmental injustice. Some of them are violent in nature, but environmental movements in India have evolved from the Gandhian tradition of cooperation and nonviolence.

4. Gandhi criticized the Western concept of development, which he believed would ultimately lead to the destruction of humanity. Ecofeminist movements that have grown in various parts of the world also show the same concern for humanity and nature and resist through movements. In the 1970s, spontaneous women's movements around the world revealed the connection between the health and life of women and the destruction of nature. All these spontaneously born campaigns were characterized by the awareness of the vulnerability of women to environmental pollution and the desire to hear their voices in decision-making processes. In 1973, the Chiko movement began to protect the Himalayan forests and livelihoods practiced by women in harmony with nature. Wangari Maathai founded a reforestation project in Kenya in 1977, whose main goal was to promote a positive image and independence of women. In 1980-1981, two very important events made the movement visible at an international level: 1980. In Washington, two thousand women besieged the Pentagon for to protest against nuclear energy, and in 1981 there was a demonstration at Greenham Common, a missile base in England. The potential destruction of the planet through destructive technology was one of the main concerns of these protests. The relationship between science, women and nature was one of the first to receive the attention of ecofeminists.

**Conclusion:**

Ecofeminist writers such as Val Plumwood, Carolyn Merchant, Charlene Carol Adams, Carol Christ, Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies all addressed an ecofeminist perspective in their works and criticized the deterioration of the environment caused by changing the development parameters necessary for modern development and existence of nature and in turn of man. Thus, the study concludes the agreements between Gandhi's environmentalism and ecofeminism in various topics such as the criticism of modern development, the dominance of women and the effect of technology on women, and the need to create an egalitarian society free from the dominance and exploitation of women and nature.

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