



## **ECOFEMINISM IN INDIAN LITERATURE: REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN, NATURE, AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM**

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**Abstract:**

Ecofeminism in Indian literature intricately intertwines themes of gender, nature, and environmental activism, offering diverse perspectives on women's roles as nurturers of the environment and victims of its degradation. Through narratives, poems, and essays, Indian writers' critique patriarchal and capitalist structures, highlighting the interconnectedness of women and nature. They amplify marginalized voices, advocate for environmental justice, and envision sustainable futures grounded in equity and care for the Earth. This research explores the intersectionality of women, nature, and activism, the diversity of literary forms and cultural contexts, the role of literary activism in advocating for change, and the significance of ecofeminist perspectives in addressing pressing socio-environmental challenges.

**Keywords:** Ecofeminism, Indian literature, Gender, Environmental activism

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## I. Introduction

Ecofeminism in Indian literature<sup>1</sup> emerges as a vibrant discourse that intricately weaves together themes of gender, nature, and environmental activism within the rich tapestry of India's cultural and social landscape. Through diverse literary forms such as narratives, poems, essays, and more, this discourse illuminates the complex interplay between women's roles as nurturers of the environment and victims of its degradation, while also celebrating nature's beauty, spirituality, and interconnectedness with human life. Indian writers, drawing from centuries-old traditions and contemporary realities, offer nuanced portrayals of the exploitation of both women and the natural world, highlighting the ways in which patriarchy, capitalism, and environmental destruction are intertwined. From the bold narratives of Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things"<sup>2</sup> to the incisive essays of Vandana Shiva, the evocative short stories of Mahasweta Devi, and the lyrical poetry of Kamala Das, ecofeminist perspectives in Indian literature challenge dominant narratives, amplify marginalized voices, and advocate for environmental justice and sustainability. Through literary activism, these authors invite readers to reconsider their relationships with nature, recognize the disproportionate impacts of environmental degradation on women, particularly those from marginalized communities, and envision alternative futures grounded in ecological harmony and social equity. In exploring these themes and texts, we gain deeper insights into the complex intersections of gender, nature, and power in the Indian context, while also finding inspiration for transformative action towards a more just and sustainable world.

## II. Reviews of literature

The review highlights the intersection of ecofeminism and environmental activism within Indian literature. It underscores a prevalent recognition of the importance of involving village communities in environmental management. However, there's a notable absence of gender discourse within these discussions. Despite the emergence of ecofeminism, gender-blind approaches persist, potentially reinforcing existing inequalities. The review questions ecofeminism's efficacy, suggesting that its historical portrayals and Indian variants may inadvertently uphold gender-inequality-inducing institutions. It advocates for boosting women's bargaining power

relative to men and environmentalists' influence over those contributing to environmental degradation. While rooted in India's context, these insights carry broader conceptual relevance for reshaping human-environment dynamics. (**Agarwal,1998**) The review highlights the evolution of ecofeminism in Indian literature, emphasizing its dual focus on women's influence on environmental interaction and the gendered analysis of environmental rhetoric. It traces ecofeminism's transition from a feminist reaction to environmental degradation towards an academic field addressing diverse socioecological issues from a female perspective. Over three decades, various methodologies have emerged to explore the connection between women and the environment in India. This research enriches the discourse on ecofeminism, providing insights into conceptualizations of women and the environment. Overall, it presents multiple ecofeminist viewpoints, underscoring the significance of understanding women's roles in environmental activism within the Indian context. (**Hartmann, 2006**). In Indian literature, the discourse on Ecofeminism intertwines with the broader societal fabric, highlighting the intricate connections between women, nature, and environmental activism. Author elucidates how Western ecofeminism often focuses on gender-environmental ideology, whereas in India, issues of caste, class, and gender are inextricably linked, evident in rallies against environmental degradation. The article scrutinizes key ecofeminist tenets and their critiques, contextualizing them within India's environmental movement. It probes whether the women's movement prioritizes environmental protection and whether addressing the concerns of women across diverse socioeconomic strata would enhance its inclusivity and efficacy. Moreover, it explores the potential synergy between feminism and the Indian environmental movement, hinting at the transformative power of a feminist perspective in shaping environmental activism in India. (**Rao, 2012**) In Indian discourse, while the term "ecofeminism" was not commonly used, its concepts permeated various sectors like media, NGOs, academia, environmental activism, and literature. These discussions often focused on the interplay between women's lives, nature, and their roles in environmental stewardship. The significance of ecofeminism lay in its intersections with other discourses, shaping identities and

<sup>1</sup> Rao, Manisha. "Ecofeminism at the crossroads in India: A review." *Dep* 20.12 (2012): 124-142.  
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<sup>2</sup> Tickell, Alex. *Arundhati Roy's the god of small things: A Routledge study guide*. Routledge, 2007.

connections. The study explored how ecofeminism influenced these dynamics and emphasized certain connections and identities. Despite evolving forms, ecofeminism remained relevant in both academic and non-academic discussions, challenging the notion of its obsolescence. (*Shoba, 2013*). The emergence and evolution of ecofeminism within Indian literature, spotlighting the interconnectedness of women, nature, and environmental activism. Initially coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974, ecofeminism posits a link between environmental degradation and the subjugation of women, emphasizing shared qualities and experiences. Through analysis of novels spanning from Kamala Markandya's "Nectar in a Sieve" (1954) to Usha K.R.'s "Monkey-Man" (2010), the review illustrates how literature serves as a lens to explore ecofeminist themes and the contributions of women authors. It underscores the expertise of women in traditional economies and advocates for a nuanced understanding of their relationship with the environment, challenging societal dichotomies. This study aims to rectify societal oversight and elevate women's voices in environmental discourse. (*Chanda, 2014*). The growing environmental crisis and the emergence of ecocriticism as a response to humanity's unsustainable exploitation of nature. In the context of Indian literature, ecocriticism illuminates the interconnectedness between women, nature, and environmental activism, particularly through the lens of ecofeminism. Indian literary works reflect the pressing environmental issues such as deforestation, climate change, and resource depletion, while also highlighting the marginalized roles of women in environmental conservation efforts. Ecofeminism in Indian literature serves as a platform for advocating for environmental justice, challenging patriarchal structures, and promoting sustainable practices. Through the analysis of literature with ecological themes, readers are encouraged to cultivate ecological awareness and foster a deeper sense of responsibility towards the planet. (*Mishra, 2016*). In the exploration of Ecofeminism in Indian Literature, Author highlights the intersectionality of postcolonial ecofeminism, female narratives from the Indian subcontinent, and environmental activism. It argues against the culture/nature duality, which historically constrained women to the natural world, advocating for a nuanced understanding. This nuanced interaction, often overlooked in traditional ecofeminist discourse, is championed by female Indian fiction writers working in English. By drawing from theoretical frameworks and

analysing works like "Nectar in a Sieve" and "The God of Small Things," the thesis delves into gender, space, and environmental dynamics. It also challenges the rural-urban dichotomy, advocating for the inclusion of urban environments in ecofeminist discourse. This interdisciplinary approach sheds light on postcolonial, gendered, and environmental concerns across different eras in India. (*Kaur, 2017*). In Indian literature, ecofeminism emerges as a critical lens intertwining environmental concerns with feminist analysis. Rooted in the 1970s and 1980s, ecofeminism challenges conventional paradigms in society and politics by highlighting the interconnectedness of oppressions. This perspective, often explored in postcolonial contexts, is exemplified in Vandana Shiva's "Staying Alive," which underscores the intersections of ecological crisis, colonialism, and women's oppression. Through postcolonial ecofeminist readings of contemporary Indian novels like Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things" and Amitav Ghosh's "The Hungry Tide," ecofeminist themes resonate, even when authored by men. Such analyses illuminate how these texts portray the complex relationships between women, nature, and environmental activism, reflecting the broader socio-political landscape of India through an ecofeminist lens. (*Tizzoni, 2018*). The emergence and evolution of ecofeminism within Indian literature. It highlights the unique context of Indian women's longstanding involvement in environmental activism, notably through movements like Chipko and Narmada Bachoo andolan. Indian ecofeminism encompasses both spiritual and material dimensions, exploring the interconnectedness of women and nature. Literary works by Indian women provide nuanced perspectives on gender, class, and urban life, challenging conventional notions of modernity. These narratives depict diverse female characters and their evolving relationships with the environment, spanning rural communities from the 1940s to the 2000s. Through these portrayals, Indian ecofeminism emphasizes the intrinsic oneness of all living beings and underscores the significant role of female writers in shaping this philosophical framework. (*Bala, 2018*). The review by explores the intersection of ecofeminism with Indian literature, focusing on the works of Rabindranath Tagore, the renowned Indian writer and Nobel laureate. It highlights ecofeminism as a merging of ecological and feminist ideologies aimed at challenging patriarchal norms and their exploitation of both women and the environment. Tagore's short stories, often lauded for their portrayal of women's roles in society, are re-

examined through the lens of ecofeminism. They depict Indian women as resilient, compassionate, and resourceful, confronting adversity with strength and bravery. This reframing of Tagore's narratives sheds light on the interconnectedness of gender oppression and environmental degradation, offering insights into how literature can contribute to environmental activism and feminist discourse within the Indian context. **(Suma, 2019)** The ecofeminism's emergence as a movement addressing environmental degradation and gender inequality stemming from patriarchy. It emphasizes the destructive impact of patriarchal and capitalist ideals, leading to the exploitation of nature for personal gain and a disconnect between the environment and culture. Ecofeminism advocates for gender parity through valuing organic processes, holistic relationships, intuition, and collaboration, aiming to reassess non-linear structures. Ecofeminist literature, exemplified by works like "The Hungry Tide" (2004) by Amitav Ghosh, critiques societal norms that oppress both women and nature. The review underscores the urgency of coordinated efforts to protect the Earth to ensure her survival. **(Rao, 2020)**. The review highlights the evolution of ecofeminism in Indian literature, emphasizing its dual focus on women's influence on environmental processes and the gendered aspects of environmental discourse. It traces ecofeminism's trajectory from a feminist reaction to environmental degradation to a multidisciplinary academic field concerned with various socioecological issues, often from a female perspective. Over the past three decades, multiple methodologies have emerged to explore the connection between women and the environment in India. The study underscores the significance of ecofeminist perspectives in understanding conceptualizations of women and the environment, contributing to a broader discourse on ecofeminism's relevance within the Indian context and its implications for environmental activism. **(Swaroop, 2020)**. The review convergence of ecofeminism and semiotics into ecofemiotics, exploring themes of women, nature, and environmental activism in Indian literature. It establishes an Ecofeminist motif index, revealing women's connection to nature and their role in planetary stewardship. Terra-Fem, Aqua-Fem, Flora-Fem, and Fauna-Fem motifs contribute to Naturo-Cultural Density, while Chronos-Fem and Topos-Fem motifs influence Spatio-Temporal relativity. Oikonomo-Value Intensity and Spirituo-Physical Gravity are depicted through various motifs, such as Pre-Fem, Pro-Fem, Philo-Fem, Mater-Fem, and Sis-Fem. Examples from Indian

classical literature, including the Buddhist Therigatha, Sanskrit "Shakuntala" by Kalidasa, and Tamil "Akam" poetry, validate the thesis. Ecofeminist signs and symbols signify interdependence, intrinsic value, abundance, and the cyclical cycle of life, aiming for gender equality and sustainable development through women's eco-pragmatic perspectives. **(Porselvi, 2020)** The review explores Ecofeminism in Indian literature, focusing on the nexus between gender, environment, and sustainability. It highlights the interplay between feminist issues and environmental policy, emphasizing the potential exacerbation of women's subordination without addressing gender equality. Using a case study from Tamil Nadu's Nilgiris region, it illustrates local efforts for environmental sustainability and women's economic empowerment, hindered by patriarchal structures. The essay draws on Bina Agarwal's theory, linking gender differences in conservation attitudes to labor division and economic resources. It underscores power dynamics shaping women's relationship with nature in the Global South, showcasing various manifestations of oppression. Overall, the review reveals the intricate connections between women, nature, and activism in Indian literature within the framework of Ecofeminism. **(Suresh, 2021)**. The paper found that Ecofeminism was a social movement that sought to improve society in all its aspects, including its material and intellectual infrastructure, by changing people's attitudes and behaviours. Many ecologists and authors had defined, classified, and established the link between women and the environment, and it was clear that both had contributed to human development. As a result, women and the environment were inseparable parts of any culture and civilization. Recent years saw a surge in interest in ecofeminism as a theoretical framework for studying colonial patriarchal dominance and its effects on women and the natural world. Wangari Maathai, Vandana Shiva, Mahasheta Devi, Karen J. Warren, and Arundhati Roy were among the female ecofeminist writers whose works the researcher examined, along with the contradictory nature of women's relationships with the environment and the importance of this study. **(Tupe, 2021)** In that study, the key aspects of ecofeminism in India were examined, specifically focusing on the fiction and action that were evidently centered on women. Protests against environmental degradation were on the rise throughout the Indian subcontinent, and feminist views on nature had become more prominent in recent protests against environmental deterioration and fights for basic human needs.

Within the context of the Indian environmental movement, an attempt was made to conceptualize this argument and determine whether the women's movement in India had taken up the problem of the environment. It was found that the Indian women's movement had indeed embraced it. Additionally, an examination was conducted on how contemporary Indian authors had used symbols to represent this issue in their works. (*Sheoran, 2021*)

### **III. Intersectionality of Women, Nature, and Environmental Activism**

This paper explores the intersectionality of women, nature, and environmental activism within the discourse of ecofeminism in Indian literature. This intersectionality highlights the interconnectedness of gender, ecology, and social justice, emphasizing the ways in which women are both deeply affected by environmental issues and play crucial roles in environmental activism<sup>3</sup>. Indian literature, through its diverse forms and cultural contexts, offers a lens through which to understand and interrogate these connections. Writers depict women not only as stewards of nature but also as victims of environmental degradation, drawing parallels between the exploitation of women and the exploitation of the natural world. Furthermore, the portrayal of nature as a source of sustenance, beauty, and spirituality underscores its intrinsic value and the need for its protection. Within this framework, environmental activism emerges as a vital aspect of ecofeminist discourse, advocating for sustainable and equitable alternatives to address pressing environmental challenges. By examining these intersections in Indian literature, we gain insight into the complex dynamics of power, oppression, and resistance, while also finding inspiration for collective action towards a more just and sustainable future.

### **IV. Diversity of Literary Forms and Cultural Contexts**

This section highlights the diversity of literary forms and cultural contexts within the discourse of ecofeminism in Indian literature. This diversity underscores the multifaceted nature of ecofeminist thought and its manifestation across various genres, languages, and cultural traditions within India. From narratives to poems, essays, and more, Indian literature offers a rich array of expressions through which to explore the intersections of women, nature, and environmental activism.<sup>4</sup> Each literary

form provides unique insights into these themes, reflecting the cultural nuances and social realities of different regions and communities across the country. Moreover, the cultural contexts in which these literary works are situated add layers of complexity to our understanding of ecofeminism, highlighting the ways in which it is shaped by local histories, traditions, and struggles. By examining this diversity, we gain a more nuanced appreciation of the complex relationships between gender, ecology, and social justice within the Indian context, while also recognizing the interconnectedness of ecofeminist movements across global landscapes.

### **V. Role of Literary Activism in Advocating for Environmental Justice**

In the introduction, we explore the role of literary activism in advocating for environmental justice within the framework of ecofeminism in Indian literature. Literary activism serves as a powerful tool for raising awareness, mobilizing communities, and challenging dominant narratives surrounding environmental issues. Through narratives, poems, essays, and other forms of literary expression, writers engage with ecofeminist principles to critique systems of oppression, advocate for sustainable practices, and amplify the voices of marginalized communities disproportionately affected by environmental degradation. By depicting the interconnectedness of gender, nature, and power, literary activists call attention to the complex dynamics underlying environmental injustices and inspire readers to take action. Moreover, these literary works serve as catalysts for social change, sparking dialogue, fostering solidarity, and galvanizing movements towards a more just and sustainable future. Through an examination of the role of literary activism in ecofeminist discourse, we gain insight into the transformative potential of storytelling and creative expression in shaping environmental consciousness and advocating for collective action.

### **VI. Exploration of Patriarchy, Capitalism, and Environmental Destruction**

In the section, we explored for patriarchy, capitalism, and environmental destruction within the discourse of ecofeminism in Indian literature. Writers critically examine the intersections of these systems of power, recognizing their intertwined roles in perpetuating environmental degradation

<sup>3</sup> Ducre, Kishi Animashaun. "The Black feminist spatial imagination and an intersectional environmental justice." *Environmental Sociology* 4.1 (2018): 22-35.

<sup>4</sup> Stephens, John. "Schemas and scripts: Cognitive instruments and the representation of cultural diversity in children's literature." *Contemporary children's literature and film: Engaging with theory* (2011): 12-35.



and gender inequality. Patriarchal structures often exploit both women and nature, viewing them as resources to be controlled and exploited for profit and dominance. Capitalism exacerbates this exploitation, prioritizing short-term economic gains over long-term sustainability and social justice.<sup>5</sup> Through narratives, poems, and essays, Indian writers interrogate the ways in which patriarchy and capitalism intersect to perpetuate environmental injustices, disproportionately impacting marginalized communities and exacerbating gender disparities. By exposing these power dynamics, ecofeminist literature challenges dominant narratives, advocates for systemic change, and envisions alternative paradigms grounded in equity, sustainability, and care for the Earth and its inhabitants. Through an exploration of patriarchy, capitalism, and environmental destruction, ecofeminist literature invites readers to critically reflect on their relationships with power, nature, and each other, while also inspiring collective action towards a more just and sustainable world.

### VII. Depiction of Nature's Beauty, Spirituality, and Interconnectedness

We explored into the depiction of nature's beauty, spirituality, and interconnectedness within the discourse of ecofeminism in Indian literature. Writers often portray nature as a source of profound beauty and spiritual significance, celebrating its diverse landscapes, flora, and fauna. Through vivid imagery and lyrical language, literary works evoke a sense of awe and wonder towards the natural world, inviting readers to appreciate its intrinsic value and complexity. Moreover, nature is often imbued with spiritual meanings, with writers drawing from indigenous traditions, folklore, and mythology to explore the sacred relationship between humans and the environment. This spiritual connection highlights the interconnectedness of all living beings and underscores the importance of respecting and protecting the Earth. Furthermore, Indian literature emphasizes the intricate web of relationships within ecosystems, portraying nature as a dynamic and interconnected web of life. By depicting nature's beauty, spirituality, and interconnectedness, ecofeminist literature in India<sup>6</sup>

fosters a deeper appreciation for the environment and inspires readers to cultivate a more harmonious relationship with the natural world. Through an exploration of these themes, writers challenge anthropocentric views of nature and advocate for ecological stewardship grounded in reverence, care, and reciprocity.

### VIII. Significance of Research

The significance of researching ecofeminism<sup>7</sup> in Indian literature, particularly its representations of women, nature, and environmental activism, lies in its potential to contribute to multiple fields and societal discourses as following key points.

- **Academic Contribution:** This research enriches academic scholarship by expanding our understanding of ecofeminism within the context of Indian literature. It provides insights into how ecofeminist principles are expressed, negotiated, and contested within diverse literary forms and cultural contexts. Scholars in fields such as literature, environmental studies, feminist theory, and cultural studies can benefit from the nuanced analyses of texts and themes.
- **Environmental Advocacy:** By highlighting the interconnectedness between gender, nature, and social justice, this research can inform environmental advocacy efforts. It sheds light on the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on women and marginalized communities, fostering a deeper understanding of the intersectional dimensions of environmental justice. Moreover, it underscores the importance of amplifying marginalized voices and incorporating feminist perspectives into environmental activism.
- **Cultural Understanding:** Exploring ecofeminism in Indian literature provides insights into cultural values, beliefs, and traditions related to gender and the environment. It facilitates cross-cultural dialogue and fosters appreciation for diverse ways of conceptualizing and relating to nature. This understanding is crucial for fostering empathy, respect, and collaboration across different cultural and social contexts in addressing global environmental challenges.
- **Policy Implications:** Research on ecofeminism in Indian literature can inform policy-making processes by highlighting the complex interplay

<sup>5</sup> Sabates-Wheeler, Rachel, and Stephen Devereux. "Transformative social protection: the currency of social justice." *Social protection for the poor and poorest: Concepts, policies and politics*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008. 64-84.

<sup>6</sup> Zhang, Jia Wei, Ryan T. Howell, and Ravi Iyer. "Engagement with natural beauty moderates the positive *Eur. Chem. Bull.* **2022**, *11*(Regular Issue 2), 654-661

relation between connectedness with nature and psychological well-being." *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 38 (2014): 55-63.

<sup>7</sup> Banerjee, Mita. "10 Ecocriticism and Postcolonial Studies." *Handbook of ecocriticism and cultural ecology* 2 (2016): 194.

between gender, ecology, and power dynamics. It encourages policymakers to adopt more inclusive and intersectional approaches to environmental governance and resource management. By recognizing the voices and concerns of women and marginalized communities, policies can be developed that promote environmental sustainability and social equity.

• **Educational Opportunities:** This research offers educational opportunities for students to engage critically with literature, feminism, and environmental issues. It encourages interdisciplinary inquiry and fosters critical thinking skills by examining complex socio-environmental problems through a literary lens. By incorporating ecofeminist perspectives into curricula, educators can empower students to become informed and active agents of environmental and social change.

Overall, the significance of researching ecofeminism in Indian literature lies in its potential to inform scholarship, advocacy, policymaking, education, and cultural understanding, ultimately contributing to efforts towards a more just, equitable, and sustainable world.

## IX. Conclusion

In a nutshell, the ecofeminism in Indian literature emerges as a powerful discourse that challenges dominant narratives, celebrates interconnectedness, and advocates for transformative change. Through narratives, poems, essays, and more, Indian writers navigate the complex interplay between gender, nature, and environmental activism, shedding light on the exploitation of both women and the natural world. By critiquing patriarchal and capitalist structures, amplifying marginalized voices, and envisioning alternative futures, ecofeminist literature inspires readers to reconsider their relationships with nature and recognize the urgency of addressing environmental injustices. The diversity of literary forms and cultural contexts within this discourse reflects the richness and complexity of ecofeminist thought, highlighting the importance of cultural sensitivity and contextuality in addressing environmental challenges. Moving forward, ecofeminism in Indian literature has the potential to inform academic scholarship, environmental advocacy, policy-making, and education, contributing to efforts towards a more just, equitable, and sustainable world. By embracing ecofeminist principles and amplifying diverse voices, we can work towards building a future where gender equality, environmental

sustainability, and social justice are prioritized, fostering harmony between humanity and the natural world.

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