

# Eco-feminist Ethics: A Sustainable Approach to the Environmental Crisis

## Etyka eko-feministyczna: zrównoważone podejście do kryzysu ekologicznego

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### Abstract

What if all the plants and plateaus, rocks and mountains, air and water of the planet vanish – except human beings? and what if all human beings vanished, leaving behind everything else on the planet? The first alternative seems unimaginable. However, the second one seems impractical but highly romantic. This, however, shows the significance of two categories at hand, viz. humans on one hand and the rest of the planet on the other. Two categories are not even simple binaries enjoying equal status in the world of values. No one knows how the former assumes the power to dominate the latter. Moreover, it is thoroughly backed by vindication. Domination gets justification, exploitation finds plausibility. The rest of nature thus is vindicated and vanquished in the name of progress and prosperity. In this article, we discuss the current environmental degradation which occurs due to the dualistic mindset of human beings. As we move towards a philosophical analysis, we adopt an eco-feminist approach to coping with the current environmental catastrophe. This paper promote ecofeminist ideology as a viable alternative policy and ethical model for environmental conservation, demonstrating a sustainable approach grounded in eco-feminist philosophy. This paper has a two-fold objective: first to examine the internal connection between women and nature from an eco-feminist perspective; and second, to explore a sustainable approach to meet the environmental crisis. Through this paper, we establish the relationship between ecofeminism and the sustainability approach, integrating philosophical, ecological and social perspectives.

**Key words:** care ethics, environmental ethics, eco-feminism, sustainability, sustainable development

### Streszczenie

Co by się stało, gdyby wszystkie rośliny, płaskowyże, skały i góry, powietrze i woda zostały zniszczone – poza ludźmi? A co gdyby to ludzie wyginęli, a reszta planety przetrwała? Pierwsza opcja wydaje się niewyobrażalna. Druga raczej niepraktyczna, choć może romantyczna. Obie opcje wskazują na dwie ważne kategorie: z jednej strony ludzie a z drugiej nasza planeta. Te kategorie nie są binarne, nie mają równego statusu w świecie wartości. Nie jest jasne, jak ta pierwsza przejmuje władzę nad drugą. Co więcej, jest to usprawiedliwiane. Dominacja pozyskuje uzasadnienie, eksploatacja wiarygodność. Pozostała część przyrody zostaje ujarzmiona i pokonana w imię postępu i dobrobytu. W tej pracy, poddajemy analizie obecny poziom degradacji środowiska, wynikający z dualistycznego sposobu myślenia współczesnych ludzi. W analizie filozoficznej przyjmujemy podejście eko-feministyczne jako sposób na zażegnanie katastrofy ekologicznej. Ten artykuł eko-feminizm jako realną alternatywną

strategię i etyczny model ochrony przyrody, pokazują zrównoważone podejście umocowane w filozofii eko-feministycznej. Założyliśmy dwa cele: po pierwsze zbadać inherentne powiązania pomiędzy kobietami a przyrodą z perspektywy eko-feministycznej, a po drugie zbadać zrównoważone podejście do kryzysu ekologicznego. Spróbujemy odnaleźć powiązanie pomiędzy eko-feminizmem a zrównoważonym rozwojem, integrując wymiary: filozoficzny, ekologiczny i społeczny.

**Słowa kluczowe:** etyka troski, etyka środowiskowa, eko-feminizm, zrównoważoność, zrównoważony rozwój

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## Introduction

Ecological deterioration and social inequality are two interconnected major crises of the twenty-first century. Alongside gendered poverty and the exclusion of women from environmental decision-making, climate change, deforestation, pollution, and biodiversity loss have all intensified. Two theoretical and ethical frameworks- eco-feminism and the sustainability approach have arisen to address these interrelated problems. Both oppose the exploitative patriarchal and anthropocentric structures that underpin contemporary growth. Ecofeminism highlights the profound links between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women, whereas sustainability emphasizes the balance between ecological integrity, social justice, and economic viability. When combined, they offer a comprehensive framework for imagining a just and sustainable future. Through this paper, we discuss how ecofeminist ethics suggest a sustainable approach to sustain nature. But, before diving deep into ecofeminism, it's important to understand the basis of human psychology to make a binary separation between humans and nature. Being the most intelligent human being starts dominance over less intelligent beings of any kind. The knowledge provided power, not revelation. So nature lost assimilation but humiliation. A series of humiliations thus revolted back in the form of natural catastrophes, which dismantled the very structure of power. So, from business to ethics, the human psyche took a paradigm shift. Ethical theories, namely anthropocentrism, biocentrism, are on the floor. The millionaire question, however, remains: are these theories adequate? Are these theories self-vindicating? The dichotomy between nature and human being stems from our art, culture, religion, history, philosophy, and society, all of which influence people to think and act in certain ways. This is a common anthropocentric worldview that asserts human dominance over nature in the world. Assume that the human being occupies the central position in evaluating everything that exists in this universe (Callicott, 1989). Following that, in response to Anthropocentrism's assumptions and implications, two more environmental ethical theories emerged: Biocentrism and Eco-centrism. On the one hand, Bio-centrism asserts that every living thing in this biosphere is of equal value and importance (Taylor, 1986), while Eco-centrism states that the environment as a whole is the centre of the universe and the entire ecosystem is delicately interconnected (Naess, 1973). Both these positions are anti-anthropocentric, claiming that human and non-human life have equal value, importance, and rights. The entire creation resembles a chain of interconnected links. If one of them is disturbed, the entire system will be destroyed. However, in contrast to the assumptions and consequences of all of these official environmental theories, ecofeminism emerges as a viable option for better equipping people to care for nature.

## Eco-feminist ethical model: a conceptual overview

The time has come to explore new theories for environmental sustainability because existing ethical environmental theories, viz., anthropocentrism and biocentrism contains internal loopholes. These theories revolve around an ethical model focused on right and justice. Eco-feminists, however advocate a different strategy grounded in care and responsibility, opposing the traditional justice and right approach. They asserts that by adopting care and responsibility as moral principles, we can not only address present environmental issues, but also improve practices in domains such as politics, medicine, and education (Gilligan, 1982; Plumwood, 1993). Eco-feminist theorists propose care ethics for the preservation and protection of the natural environment (Warren, 1990; Gaard, 1993). When it comes to formulating ethical norms and moral principles for better societal functioning, it is frequently observed that human rights and human integrity come first. Hence, in the process of setting ethical rules and regulations for society, ethicists primarily focuses on human beings and their right to live. However, according to feminist theorists, employing the terminology of right, justice, equality and so on may not produce the best results when dealing with environmental issues. For this reason, we must encourage a care-based ethical approach not only to environmental challenges but also to feminist concerns. It is our responsibility to protect the natural environment, and therefore it is essential to adopt a care-sensitive attitude towards environmental wellbeing.

Care ethics is a new area of study proposed by feminist thinkers in the twenty-first century. Feminist thinkers use the moral concept of care to address any practical challenge in life. As a moral theory, care ethics endorses the interpersonal relationship between all. The focus of care ethics is on care and benevolence as moral virtues (Held, 2006). According to care ethics, every moral action must be guided by the principle of care and benevolence, while all existing mainstream environmental theories are more focused on providing rights, justice, and equality to na-

ture. Additionally, establishing environmental laws and discussing environmental rights makes it simpler for mankind to dominate nature and prioritise self-interest. In the process of developing a policy or a law, the maker (human being) constantly prioritises themselves and ignores others (non-humans). According to care ethicists and, in particular, eco-feminist thinkers, this type of restricted mindset should be changed, and care-centred policy or law should be created. The eco-feminists' opposing ideological stance needs more clarification and in-depth philosophical study. Hence, let us examine what eco-feministic ideology is and how ecofeminism emerged as a moral philosophy.

Ecofeminism is an evolved type of feminism that fights for women's social justice, such as the right to vote, the right to politics, the right to acknowledgement, inequality, class, and poverty, among other things (Mies and Shiva, 1993). Environmental justice concerns, such as environmental rights, environmental laws, and various sorts of environmental protection measures, are gradually being researched by feminists. But why is this the case? Why did feminists suddenly start talking about different social problems? Is there any relationship between environmental justice and social justice? Eco-feminist believes that environmental justice and social justice have a common cause and that addressing one requires addressing the other (Gaard and Gruen, 1993). This is an interesting stand taken by eco-feminists, and one thing they all seem to agree on is that sexism exists in many social structures and throughout history. It continues to exist in many societies today, and it is morally wrong and harmful. However, ecofeminism is a type of feminist viewpoint that claims that both environmental annihilation and social inequities (racism, poverty, and sexism) share a common cause (Warren, 2000). It is a type of hierarchical thinking or framework that we have a proclivity to employ in our culture. The argument here is that humans tend to categorise differences into these value hierarchies. This depicts a differentiation in which X differs from Y in the same way as x is superior. As a result, x's dominance over y is justified. Male / Female, Civilised / Uncivilised, White / Non-white, Human / Nature are a few examples. Here, male, civilised, white, and human are justifying themselves to the dominant female, uncivilised, non-white, and nature, respectively, because the former is superior to the latter. Ecofeminism contends that these differences are viewed as binary distinctions, or one thing or another thing. In each of these circumstances, one has a better chance of being more valuable than the other. Eco-feminists such as Karen J. Warren and Vandana Shiva have claimed that this type of thinking will always make a reflection in our thinking when we look at the world. And we always believe that the superior should be in control of the inferior. As a result, eco-feminists say that in order to address environmental destruction, one must question the value-hierarchical way of thinking and frameworks that use the binary distinction. Thus, in this regard to showcasing the pattern of domination, Charis Thompson cotes from Merchant and argues, *persuasively for a view that subsequently became one of the two core tenets of ecofeminism: that the domination of women and the domination of nature are structurally linked* (Carolyn, 1990).

Eco-feminism stems from feminism and evolves into a critical way of thinking about the environment. But, still, ecofeminism requires a deeper knowledge; let us go over what it is? Ecofeminism is a term that combines feminism and ecology. It is mostly an intellectual movement that addresses male dominance over both nature and women. As Ruether puts it, *women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination* (Ruether, 1975). In every eco-feministic literature, ecofeminism is most often described as the perception that environmentalism and feminism are intrinsically connected. Ecofeminism is concerned with gender inequalities in society and environmental preservation. Eco-feminist theories are always drawing comparisons between the subjugation of the environment and the domination of women. As Shiva and Mies point out, the way contemporary society operates as a dominating patriarchal worldview makes it impossible to imagine women's liberation on the one hand and nature's freedom on the other. As a result, the essence of dominance is rooted in one place, and both will be abolished by tackling patriarchal dominance at its source (Mies and Shiva, 1993). While ecofeminism may appear to be a feminist ideology that advocates for the protection of the environment, it is more than that. Ecofeminism, aims to demolish the current view regarding nature and replace it with the concept that all things in the world have value and worth. Furthermore, it creates a worldview in which men, women, nature, and plants all contribute their best to the preservation and sustainability of the planet ( Shiva, 1989). Every living or non-living thing and creature has a unique characteristic in relation to the environment that distinguishes it from others. Literature reveals that in 1974 the term Ecofeminism was coined by D'Eaubonne to demonstrate an intrinsic link between ecology and women. However, as Warren points out, the decade of the 1990s was marked by a significant environmental catastrophe, and as a result the international community began to take environmental issues more seriously. Prior to 1974, environmental issues were largely regarded as a regional concern, but after that, they gained national and global recognition. In this context, the ecological feminists established their own stand and emerged as an alternative ethical theory.

### **The emergence of ecofeminism**

Ecofeminism evolved from feminism; therefore, its roots may be traced back to that (feminist) movement, but it was officially recognised as an environmental and academic subject in 1970 when feminist activists proclaimed

an inherent relationship between women and nature. In response to this growing awareness of the environment and women, various eco-feministic movements emerged around the world, such as the *Chipko Movement* and the *Green Belt Movement*. These eco-feminist movements frequently highlight women's participation in environmental causes for the sake of a sustainable future. These global movements, where activists like Wangari Maathai, Vandana Shiva, Sunderlal Bahuguna, and Medha Patkar fight for a sustainable future, can serve as case studies of ecofeminist sustainability. Let's go deep into it.

**Green Belt Movement:** Wangari Maathai founded the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, combining ecological restoration with gender empowerment by enabling rural women to improve livelihoods, plant trees, and rehabilitate damaged lands (Maathai, 2004).

**Narmada Bancho Andolan:** Women activists Medha Patkar highlighted the connection between ecological and social justice by opposing a massive dam that uprooted pollution and devastated the ecosystem (Patkar, 1995).

**Navadayan Movement:** The movement led by Indian environmentalist Vandana Shiva supports organic farming, biodiversity, and seed sovereignty. She contends that industrial agriculture and monoculture, which are byproducts of patriarchal capitalism, undermine social and ecological sustainability. An ecofeminist perspective on sustainable agriculture is embodied in Navdayan (Shiva, 1997).

**Chipko Movement:** To stop commercial loggers from clearing forests, rural women in Uttarakhand embraced trees in the 1970s. This grassroots environmental movement, which was primarily led by women activists, embodies ecofeminist ideals by connecting ecological preservation with women's survival. It also had an impact on India's sustainable forest management laws (Bahuguna, 1987). These case studies show that ecofeminist principles offer real-world routes to sustainable living rather than being theoretical. However, for a more peaceful future, ecofeminism and sustainable development need to go hand in hand.

Ecofeminism appears to have emerged peacefully in Western countries, focusing on women's issues and environmental movements. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, ecofeminism became an emerging area of study and research. It has since been studied in depth by environmental activists, social activists, and feminist activists across the world. The first Eco-feminist conference, *Women and Life on Earth: Ecofeminism in the 1980s*, was held at Amherst, Massachusetts, in response to increasing interest in the field. Ynestra King was an influential thinker in eco-feminist philosophy during this time, claiming that ecofeminism is nothing more than the interconnectedness and wholeness of many environmental theories and practices. According to King (1989), the driving force behind ecological destruction is corporate and military powers, which are matter for deep feminist concern. Eco-feminists also speak out against contemporary developments such as nuclear weapons, genetic engineering, and reproductive technologies. As a result, they oppose technological advancements that are harmful to both women and nature (Mies and Shiva, 1993; Salleh, 1997). Whatever objection may arise against such changes they rooted in the fact that these developments affects their lifestyle and influence the way they wish to live. Eco-feminism here refers to those perspectives that are often overlooked by mainstream outlook and emphasize the understanding of shared condition of women and nature under the male dominance. According to Warren, it's critical to comprehend the internal relationship between women and nature. When one understands both form of oppressions, one may grasp the essence of ecofeminism and recognize how the two crises are two sides of the same coin (Warren, 1987). Feminists encourage people to understand the core ideological difference. Eco-feminism argue that everyone possess their own ideology and style of thinking and that if the ideology is correct, the activities will be correct; conversely, if the ideology is flawed, the behaviour will also be flawed. By following the eco-feminist model of ethics and conquering the customary conceptual framework about nature and women, eco-feminists endorse cultural equality, non-violence, non-hierarchical form of society to bring a fresh social order where one has the realisation of the interconnectedness of all life forms (Plumwood, 1993; Shiva, 1989). As a result, we must realise ourselves in the context of others, our soul in the context of other souls, and see the universe as a unified whole linked in one chain. Thus, the psychological power of supremacy over nature and women has vanished.

### Eco-feminist perspective on the environment

The most significant contribution of eco-feminism to environmental ethics lies in its ability to challenge the dominant ethical frameworks traditionally applied to environmental issues. Eco-feminists have critically questioned both anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism theories, noting that while these theories address societal and environmental concern, they are nonetheless constructed upon conventional ethical foundations particularly those derived from utilitarian and Kantian models. Such approach assume that an action is morally permissible if it is universally applicable and provides the greatest amount of utility. Eco-feminist philosophers argue that these assumptions are inadequate because they fail to account for the intrinsic value of nature and overlook the gendered dimension of environment degradation (Holland, 2000). It has generally been accepted that the male life sphere is expensive and extend into the public sphere, whereas the female life sphere is confined to the domestic sphere. It is time to rethink this mindset as women are increasingly breaking free from such stereotypes and participating in various fields, including environmental activities, education and politics in order to understand their personal re-

relationship with nature. Accordingly, eco-feminist environmental ethics recognize the value of individual's emotional and experiential relationships with nature. This serve as possible alternative given by eco-feminists. Consequently scholar across the world have attempted to reframe the existing world view regarding nonhuman nature by incorporating valuable ethical concepts in to it. For example, Aldo Leopold's classic work *Land Ethics* in which he demonstrates the moral relationship between land and human being showing how they belong to the same moral community (Leopold, 1949). Similarly, the works of Karen Warren formulate a care-sensitive ethical approach towards nature in which care becomes central to moral reasoning. In order to showcase a wider perspective to care, both Virginia Held (Held, 2006) and Fiona Robinson (Robinson, 1999) assert that caring should not be restricted to one's own family or close friends, rather it must be encompasses a wider ethical outlook that acknowledge relationship with others beyond those immediately known. Moreover, Roger King argues that for the sake of protection and preservation of our natural environment, caring must be accomplished along with emotional as well as psychological capacities (King, 1996). Eco-feminists, therefore more concerned with the exploitation of nature, its structural roots and possible alternatives. According to Thompson, the growth of science, technology, and capitalism imposes dominance over both women and nature. Under the guise of modernization, human being begins to exploit these two simultaneously. Yet a major concern is that in academic activity, this profoundly significant issues receives inadequate attention (Thompson, 2006). As a social and political enquiry ecofeminism asserts women's potential to fight against all kinds of social injustice and try to build a revolutionary movement for the preservation and protection of this planet. Eco-feminists bring a new way of thinking by pursuing their goal of liberating both women and nature from patriarchal dominance. Although the goal is challenging and methods for achieving it may not be fully clear, feminist take firm position and diverse approaches as opinion within eco-feminist discussion vary across different group.

### Essentialist ecofeminism

According to certain eco-feminist philosophers, women are more capable of defending and maintaining the environment when an essentialist perspective is adopted. They are believe to better suited to deal with the environmental crisis because of their perceived intimate connection with nature. The approach is termed essentialist because both women and nature are said to share the same essential characteristic. In order to describe complex idealistic view of essentialist environmentalists, Thompson showcases the difference that makes women closer to nature than men. This is attributed to the essential qualities that women are thought to possess. The argument doesn't claim that men are incapable of protecting and preserving the environment; rather, it suggests that women may be uniquely positioned to do so. The concept of care is extremely important in this context. By addressing the vocabulary of care, essentialist eco-feminist argues that characteristics like reproductive, life-giving, caring, and nurturing are some of the unique qualities that connect women essentially with the environment (King, 1991). Although women and nature said to share several essential qualities, the relations between them benefits from deeper mutual understanding. Thompson further asserts that these gendered-centred characteristics motivate women to fight and protect against radical natural resource extraction, millenarianism, and ecological disharmony (Thompson, 2006). Celebrating these unique characteristics, Salleh narrates how women's monthly fertility cycle, pregnancy, the wrench of childbirth, and suckling an infant will enable women to flow in harmony with nature. Salleh compares the metaphor of a stream and flow of water to that of women and nature, because both deliver service to others without discriminating. From an essentialist standpoint, this connection further binds women to nature. Women are therefore more connected to nature due to their conscious self-awareness of this relationship (Salleh, 1984).

In criticising essentialist ideology, some eco-feminists argue that women are no longer inherently connected to nature in today's modernised society. They argue that it is not exclusively women who possess a specific affinity with nature; men, too, embody qualities like wilderness that make them more connected towards natural world. Consequently, King argue that nature is no longer intrinsically granted to women, despite claim of a special relationship. More specifically, both women and men have limited opportunity to connect with nature due to a general lack of interest. According to King, the essentialist position, which prioritises lived experience with nature, lacks empirical support (King, 1991). The foundation of essentialist ideology rest on the idea of essential qualities shared by both women and nature (Merchant, 1980). From this presumption, they deduce the conclusion that women are uniquely equipped to care for nature and protect natural environment. Their position places strong emphasis on care-based environmental ethic. Within Feminist ethics of care caring is treated as a moral concept, rooted in partial personal relationships and interconnectedness. Essentialist eco-feminists therefore use care as a moral virtue to establish their unique relationship with nature. For them, moral concepts like care, compassion, benevolence, responsibility, and obligations are key to addressing environmental dilemmas. The vocabulary of care ethics is consequently employed as a theoretical tool almost as a weapon to combat environmental crises (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2006; Warren, 2000).

### Conceptualist ecofeminism

In contrast to the essentialist approach, some eco-feminists promote a conceptualist perspective, arguing that eco-feminist environmental ethics must restore the conceptual opposition that patriarchal culture contracts by establishing a binary dichotomy between men and culture and women and nature. Therefore, these kinds of dualism exist culturally in each society. So, both women and nature are dominated patriarchal mindset. Members of the conceptualistic viewpoint do not reject the essentialist assumption that women's caring vocabulary is deeply rooted in them; instead, they seek to provide conceptual clarity to these environmental crises, demonstrating how both women and nature are dominated by men in a given culture. There are numerous prominent conceptualistic eco-feminists in the history of eco-feminist philosophy, such as Carolina Merchant (Merchant, 1980), Robin May Schott (Schott, 1997), Many Meller (Mellor, 1997), Karen J. Warren (Warren, 2000) and Val Plumwood (Plumwood, 1993) who have contributed enough material to eco-feminist philosophy. *Death of Nature; Women, Ecology, and Scientific Revolution* by Carolina Merchant, is widely recognised as the foundational text in eco-feminist philosophy. It has been observed that Philosophy promotes a metaphysical and normative dualism that Plumwood defines as binary or dichotomy. This dualism distinguished nature from culture, men from women, thought from the body, and matter from spirituality. These types of dualism not only distinguish one from the other but also dominate and generate a value hierarchy between them. These kinds of dangerous presuppositions give rise to the vocabulary of dominance. This elevates the dominant nature of people as well as the voice of power over the inferior. In this case, humans take the metaphysical position of thinking themselves to be distinct from others. The separated self is the sole cause of these kinds of dualistic presumptions. This detached self guides itself using terminologies such as right, justice, impartiality, and universality (Plumwood, 1993). This is one voice, but as opposed to this, we should have depicted a self that is more engaged, embedded, and embodied. This self has a close bond with the other self, and it cares for the other self. It feels for the other self and evolves sentiment for the other self. Only the language of care, love, and responsibility, which is concrete, contextual, and specific, is spoken by these voices.

### Concept of sustainability

The principle of sustainable development gained worldwide recognition with the Brundtland Report (Our Common Future, 1987), which identifies it as *development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs* (WCED, 1987). There are three fundamental pillars which sustain the sustainable approach. namely: (I) environmental sustainability (preserving biodiversity and ecosystems). (II) Social sustainability (encouraging human welfare, equality, and involvement). (III) Assuring equitable and sustained economic growth (it is also known as economic sustainability). Sustainability challenges the anthropocentric perspective of progress, which puts economic expansion ahead of ecological balance. The time has come for a systematic shift from dominance to stewardship, viewing humans as a component of nature rather than as something distinct from it (Mao, and Robinson, 2019; Lenka, 2023). However, the discourse on sustainability can sometimes become overly technocratic, emphasising policies and technological solutions while overlooking the deeper moral structural roots of environmental problems. Ecofeminism contributes significantly by integrating ethical, cultural and gender-sensitive perspectives into sustainability approaches.

In the era of twenty first century ecofeminism become an essential approach for sustainability, shifting attentions from weak anthropocentrism to ecocentrism. Time has come to realize that People matter most when we talk about right and wrong – this is what anthropocentrism says. Still, nature only counts if it helps us out in some way. Yet this view shows up in two different versions. one suggest that human beings are the only ones who really matter in a moral sense (strong sustainability). According to this view nature's worth comes just from how it helps us out. It's not about its own importance, more like what it can do for humankind. Living things besides humans? They're seen as tools rather than having their own rights. Writers such as Des Jardins (2013) point out how strict human-centred views push profit-driven expansion, tech advances, or taking natural materials – so long as people gain from them. Nature's often viewed as something to use up, which means green rules only really matter if they shield people's well-being, cash concerns, or keep things running smoothly. In brief, looking after nature matters when it helps people. Weak anthropocentrism puts people first, yet cares about nature since a healthy planet supports human life. It values ecosystems – not just for their own sake, but because they keep communities strong. Survival depends on clean air, water, so harming nature risks our future. This view links environmental protection directly to personal and societal welfare. Instead of seeing Earth as a tool, it treats nature as a vital partner in thriving. Bryan Norton (1984) backs a softer kind of anthropocentrism – where sound choices about nature come from sensible human wants, but only when they include lasting ecosystem health. Weak anthropocentrism supports sustainable development by valuing nature, not just for what it gives now, but also for what it offers later. So, weak anthropocentrism ties closely to sustainability through a focus on balance rather than growth. Saving nature now helps people thrive later on – that's what sustainable growth means (WCED, 1987). Ecofeminism moves sustainability away from human-centred views, using nature-based values instead - so protecting the environment isn't

just a tool for people. It changes focus by linking care for Earth with justice, making green efforts more genuine through deeper respect. Additionally, ecofeminist ethics highlights care, shows deep compassion, while stressing how everything's linked – a contrast to tech-driven green plans that often ignore these ideas (Warren, 2000). Ecofeminism ties into green living, yet its moral base isn't the same. Instead of focusing only on people's needs, it sees nature as having worth on its own. While one view treats Earth like a resource for survival, the other respects life in every form. It brings fairness between genders into the picture, mixing care, empathy, and challenge against control systems. This angle pushes change from within, shifting how we see our role in the natural world. This is how sustainability and ecofeminist ethics have a moral foundation.

### **Ecofeminism as the moral foundation of sustainability**

By exposing its gendered aspects and offering a moral basis for ecological justice, ecofeminism enhances the sustainability strategy. It claims that patriarchal, hierarchical structures are inherently related to the exploitation and dominance of women and the natural world. In human interactions with one another and the natural world, it promotes a radical change from a dominator culture to an ethic of kindness, compassion, and non-violence. It also asserts women as sustainability agents: women have important ecological knowledge, especially in rural societies (Lenka & Khatua, 2025). Their expertise in the management of food, fuel, and water resources is essential to sustainable development. For instance, the Chipko Movement in India during the 1970s, in which women embraced trees to stop destruction, demonstrated ecofeminist ideas in action: protecting the environment as a form of resistance and survival (Shiva, 1988). In addition to this, it further criticises the technological developments Ecofeminists criticise green capitalism, which reduces sustainability to market forces or technological efficiency. They contend that true sustainability calls for changing values rather than just advancing technology (Merchant, 1989) point out that the ecological issues are not just scientific but also essentially moral and cultural. Respecting local and indigenous knowledge.

Ecofeminism recognizes women's and indigenous ecological knowledge as essential to sustainable existence. In India, Vandana Shiva's Navdanya movement opposes corporate dominance over agriculture by promoting biodiversity, organic farming and seed sovereignty. These movements promote sustainability based on local autonomy, diversity, and justice. Environmental Democracy by promoting ecological democracy, ecofeminism makes sure that all communities, particularly women and the underprivileged part of environmental governance. This is in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, especially Goals 5 (Gender Equality) and 13 (Climate Action). Even though ecofeminism questions human-centred views in standard sustainability efforts, yet still backs many SDGs since they encourage care for nature along with fairness and rightful treatment. Ecofeminism ties closely to goals focused on fairness for women, strength in local groups, care for nature, while pushing back against harmful growth patterns. Let's discuss some of the goals which are related to ecofeminism.

#### *SDG 5: gender equality*

Ecofeminism starts by noticing how controlling women ties closely to controlling the natural world - these aren't separate issues, but connected parts of the same pattern. Vandana Shiva (1988) says male-dominated growth pushes women aside – especially when it weakens old-time earth duties like saving seeds, handling water supplies, or keeping nature diverse. Agarwal found in 1992 that females in poorer regions face worse effects from natural harm, mainly because of how work gets split by sex. It wants to end every kind of bias toward women, boost their role in leadership, while also giving them fair chances to reach what they need. Ecofeminism backs this up – it highlights how caring for nature often goes hand-in-hand with lifting up women leading efforts to protect nature, acknowledging what women have learned about nature over time, and gender-inclusive environmental decision-making. Ecofeminism says you can't have a healthy planet if women aren't treated fairly.

#### *SDG 6: clean water and sanitation*

Women – especially those living in villages – handle gathering and overseeing water supplies. Ecofeminists point out how the lack of water hits women harder, limiting health, income chances, or self-respect (Agarwal, 1992). Ecofeminism backs SDG 6's goal of fair access to clean water since Flooded rivers mess up nature while worsening life for women. When water gets sold like a product, it hits poor women hardest – Shiva showed that back in 2002. Ecofeminists back local, spread-out ways to handle water – fitting well with SDG 6's push for lasting solutions.

#### *SDG 10: reduced inequalities*

Ecofeminism shows how struggles like sexism, poverty, racism, social hierarchy, or past conquests overlap – each shaping the other (Plumwood, 1993; Warren, 2000). When nature gets hurt, those burdens hit harder on some folks. Ecofeminism pushes for justice-oriented development, a fair chance at land, plus rights to nature's rewards, and inclusive environmental governance. This expands SDG 10's role – linking unfair social gaps to environmental harm.

*SDG 12: responsible consumption and production*

Ecofeminists call out capitalism's factory-style systems that use up women's work along with forests and rivers (Mies & Shiva, 1993). Instead, they back ways of living that respect care, land, and fairness – offering visions rooted in balance rather than growth at any cost, like localised food systems, reduction of overconsumption, fair ways to live alongside nature, and turning away from money-focused resource exploitation. It wants less trash, smarter use of materials, while also protecting nature from damage. Ecofeminism backs that up – by pushing for fairness, deeper care in how we treat Earth, alongside respect for marginalised voices shaping change, community-supported agriculture, biodiversity-based farming, circular, non-extractive economies. This way still honours nature's own worth – even if regular green thinking skips it.

*SDG 13: climate action*

Ecofeminism says climate issues come from male-dominated structures that harm nature along with women (Plumwood, 1993). When disasters like dry spells or failed harvests hit, females often face tougher consequences (UN Women, 2014). Ecofeminists emphasise that women face tough times during climate disasters, yet they adapt in powerful ways, gender-responsive climate adaptation, fixing nature's connections rather than relying on gadgets. It pushes fast moves on climate, matching what ecofeminism stresses – reducing fossil-fuel dependence, community adaptation strategies, ecological restoration, and women being seen as key players in tackling climate change

*SDG 14 and SDG 15: life below water & life on land*

Ecofeminism says animals aren't just tools – they matter on their own. They should be treated with respect, simply because they exist. Leopold's idea about land (1949), along with feminist views on power, backs saving nature from male-driven harm. Women's local wisdom – like saving seeds, protecting forests, or tending wetlands - plays a key role in keeping nature diverse (Shiva, 1988). Ecofeminism strengthens these goals by advocating: guarding woods, saving seed stocks, while keeping river sources safe, sustainable harvesting, local efforts to save nature instead of big companies running protection projects, pushback against single-crop farming, along with factory-style food production. Ecofeminism ties nature variety to differences in culture and gender – connecting them through shared roots.

Ecofeminism lines up with the Sustainable Development Goals on things like protecting nature, fairness between genders, fair climate action, also saving diverse life forms. Still, it digs deeper than usual green talk by showing how male-dominated systems, profit-driven economies, alongside colonial legacies, fuel harm to Earth plus women alike. So, ecofeminism adds to the SDGs by bringing a stronger sense of ethics, power dynamics, and connection – highlighting care, fairness, while respecting nature's own worth.

**The common philosophical ground between ecofeminism and sustainability**

As of now see a lot of common ground between ecofeminism and sustainable development, but here we find some philosophical common ground. Holism, interconnectedness, and justice are the philosophical foundations of both ecofeminism and sustainability. Specially, we can see four similar thoughts, and these are the following:

- **Rejection of dualism:** Western Philosophy has frequently upheld dualistic hierarchies in which the first term predominates over the second, such as man/women, human/nature, reason/emotion and culture/nature. Sustainability and ecofeminism both oppose these dichotomies and promote an integrated worldview that acknowledges the interconnectedness of all living things.
- **Criticism of patriarchal capitalism:** Both viewpoints criticise the capitalist-patriarchal development model, which views nature and women as resources that may be exploited. They contend that to attain sustainability, exploitative economic systems that prioritise profit above life must be addressed.
- **Ethics of care and responsibility:** Ecofeminism presents an ethics of care, a moral perspective that prioritises compassion, nurturing and accountability to other people and the natural world. Similar to ecofeminist ideals of compassion and respect for one another, the sustainability approach promotes ethical consumption and responsible stewardship.
- **Comprehensive epistemology:** Both paradigms suggest moving away from mechanical, reductionist science and toward experiential, context-based, holistic knowledge systems. This change in perspective emphasises women's experience, indigenous knowledge, and local ecological knowledge as sources of sustainability.

**Why is it critical to understand what ecofeminism advocates?**

Eco-feminists attack views such as deep ecology and moral exoticism, which claim to be too abstract to capture anyone's attention. As a result, the eco-feminist argues that a focus on generalisation and abstract ideas fails to connect the human self and to establish concrete relationships among various human beings. As an outcome, we only connected with the people with whom we are in a relationship, not with others. However, eco-feminist depicts

human relationship and their given in nature as a web. This web relationship brings everyone together in a partnership and establishes a balance of diversity. In this image, Paul describes the nature of interdependence in every part of human relationships and how we are all closely connected and linked with one another. Similarly, Paul again states, in every beat of human life, he/she is always someone's son or brother, daughter or sister, father or mother, and a member of this society (Lauritzen, 1989). Thereby, the primary objective of eco-feminism is to categorise and overcome the dualism, which indirectly concludes that nature is inferior to culture (Wilson, 1997). Eco-feminists believe that the community should take a holistic approach to other animals, trees, and plants, as well as people and ecosystems (Zimmerman, 1987). To clarify the key differences between the two types of language, the voice that speaks about right and justice will be a detached and disengaged self, while the voice that speaks about care and responsibility will be an attached and embodied self. To review the essential feature of voice, Gilligan writes: In this conception, the moral problem arises from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights and requires for its resolution a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract. This conception of morality is concerned with the activity of the care-centred moral development around the understanding of responsibility and relationships, just as the conception of morality as fairness ties moral development to the understanding of rights and rules (Gilligan, 1982). Moving Toward a Common vision the sustainability approach and ecofeminism both need a shift in societal structure and human awareness, ecological harmony (Acknowledging the inherent worth of every creature is part of their shared vision), social justice (Ensuring participation and equality for all communities and genders), economic justice (Creating localized, cooperative economies) cultural change (Fostering humility, empathy, and life respect). Likewise, Vandana Shiva's concept of Earth Democracy, a vision of justice, variety, and ecological responsibility, is reflected in this integrated worldview (Shiva, 2005).

## Conclusion

The above discussion depicts that sustainability and ecofeminism have a very complementary relationship. The ethical and gender-sensitive basis that sustainability needs to overcome its technocratic constraints is provided by ecofeminism. There can be no sustainability without justice and no justice without sustainability (Mies and Shiva, 1993). A truly sustainable world must be ecofeminist, meaning humans must nurture the Earth and support all life rather than subjugate it. Sustainability, in turn, offers ecofeminism a global framework for action and policy. Together, they envision a society based on empathy, cooperation, and respect for all life's work. Through this study, we primarily investigate the structure of environmental ethics. We can observe that the majority of environmental ethical debates are grounded on the concept of right. A narrative like this can be found in key environmental ethical theories such as anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and so on. We can also see that such a narrative has a lot of internal faults. Therefore, this work intends to excavate other forms of narration pertaining to environmental ethics. The need for sound environmental ethics is obvious. On the one hand, the earth is experiencing horrible natural disasters as a result of environmental degradation; while on the other hand, the majority of the world's top official ethical systems have failed to deliver in this regard. Because the problem is so large, anyone attempting to count all environmental issues will be unable to do so. Thus, in order to lead to a philosophical discussion, this article analyses various difficulties from their roots and concludes that it is the human mentality that is the source of all such problems. As a result, individuals begin to consider adopting a more positive attitude, which will encourage us in protecting our environment. Theories such as anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and eco-centrism have all been shown to be primarily centred on the concept of right, as they attempt to provide equal rights to both humans and non-humans. As a result, eco-centric and bio-centric theories both point to the fact that the non-human world has intrinsic value that humans do not acknowledge. However, their core beliefs are also centred on human wellbeing and human rights. Apart from that, eco-feminists advocate for a caring approach to environmental issues because their primary objective is to free women and nature from patriarchal dominance. So, to accomplish this, eco-feminists attempt to relate themselves to the environment through their reproductive capacity. This connection, perhaps, is by far the most interesting and important connection. We must be clear about one point: the claims made by ecofeminism are quite rational because, first and foremost, both women and nature share the same essential qualities, and both women and nature have traditionally been dominated by culture and males. As a result, both women and nature are intimately connected and have the same cause for their dominance, which must be washed away. There have been various criticisms of eco-feminist thought. But the question remains: are the eco-feminists' claims incorrect? Is it wrong that women and nature are governed by patriarchy? Is it wrong that just by applying a right based ethical approach to the environment, we do not get a satisfactory result? Is it correct to say that the government's environmental policies and laws are insufficient? Last but not least, is it not necessary to change all these wrongs into right?

The traditional patriarchal set of dominance asserts that human beings need to regulate the environment is similar to men's need to regulate women, the bests need to regulate the poor, and whites need to regulate blacks; eco-feminist theory always opposes this set of dominance. As a result, we establish a value hierarchical order in society. Dominance and exploitation have always existed in every community, and they should be removed. Thus, in order

to initiate this process, the eco-feminists try to create a new world order. Being an eco-feminist does not necessitate a change in lifestyle or adherence to a set of rules and restrictions. An eco-feminist is someone who is concerned about natural phenomena and wants to change his or her conduct to be more environmental friendly. When someone wishes to see equality between the sexes, then he/she will become an eco-feminist. Once we have the understanding and belief that everything and beings should be treated with dignity and respect, we are all eco-feminists. So it's time to make a move into the eco-feminist ideology. And if we start practising such eco-friendly behavioural patterns, then we make a significant contribution towards a healthy planet and a healthy human society.

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