

Transforming man-other relationship: Thinking beyond dualism

Richa Kela

M.Phil. Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

Abstract

There is no doubt that there is a serious environmental damage that earth is facing today. Similarly, if we examine the condition of women, she is subjugated by man. Ecofeminism sees the critical connections between ecology and woman as both are been dominated by man of this world. Man treats them different from them and uses the term 'other'. My paper aim is to analyse both from Indian and Western perspective the reason of this dominion as well make people think beyond dualism and fight against all the odds of patriarchal system.

Keywords: ecology, feminism, rationality, dominion, gender difference, creation, non-dualism, spirituality

Introduction

Ecofeminism has become the most prevalent topic in recent years with its movements spreading worldwide. What is ecofeminism? The term Ecofeminism is derived from the union of two terms: ecology and feminism. Ecology means sustenance of nature and a healthy 'web of life'. This web of life includes all plants, animals, humans and other species living on this earth. Feminism represents the women of our society who is characterized by our society as weak, inferior, care-taker, non-violent. The correlation between nature and women is such that both are dominated by man, who is believed to have masculinity power which makes him superior and knowledgeable. Human intervention is main cause of environmental crisis that we are facing today. All ecofeminists have the same opinion that there is link between women and nature but their approaches are diverse. Ecofeminist argues, not human intervention (anthropocentric) but male-centred thinking (androcentric) degrades nature. 'Some ecofeminist philosophers such as Val Plumwood argue that the historical roots of the unjustified domination of nature originated in classical Greek philosophy and the rationalist tradition ^[1]. In Western philosophy, Descartes talks about mind-body dualism and this dualism is extended to other harmful dualisms (masculine/feminine, reason/emotion, spirit/body). This dualism is more dangerous to nature as it differentiates human, especially man from nature. In this paper, I will focus on how to recover from patriarchy dominance over nature and women, which results in degradation of ecology and splitting women from equal rights as men, by thinking beyond dualism. Plumwood interprets the connection between anthropocentric and androcentric. How the western society has given man dominance over woman and nonhuman nature? 'The category of masculinity as a socially constructed product of gender ideology is associated with the creation of the concept of

women as the 'other' ^[2]. In Karen J. Warren book *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, she mentions number of times the other-nonhuman relations, which shows that how in our society women is perceived. And this 'other' is recognized as passive, she has no individual identity in this masculinised world.

Gender-Based Difference

The term 'masculinist' and 'feminist' are socially constructed. We have categorized these two concepts based on gender. 'Ecofeminists see the separation of women from men by patterns of cultural dualism of mind-body, dominant-subordinate, thinking-feeling, and the identification of lower half of these dualisms with both women and nature, as a victimology ^[3]. 'Victimology' here means, like a woman who is unable to conceive a child is compared with land that lies fallow as useless or barren because both plays a role of victim as they are of no good in themselves and thus controlled by patriarchy. Maria Mies, a professor of sociology and author of several feminist books including *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, argued about relationship of man-the-hunter as violent, destructive in contrast with women-the-gatherer and cultivator. Unlike her argument, patriarchy ideology has made man-the-hunter, violent nature as superior and women nature inferior. But the hunt for animals and other lower species with their tools and arms adds only to destruction and violence of nature. On the other hand, women-the-gatherer adds more contribution of food for family than men do by hunting. The problem of patriarchal ideology is that it treats gender based difference to be ultimately real. But in real these are the difference that are socially constructed by society. The best example one can give here is of Mahatma Gandhi, who was a man after all and a preacher of non-violence. I want to indicate here that the qualities are not fixed based on the gender. One must construct his self to

¹ Warren, Karen J. Warren. 2000. "What are Ecofeminists Saying?" In *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, by Karen J. Warren, 21-41. United States of America: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. pp.23

² Shiva, Vandana. 1988. "Women in Nature." In *Staying Alive*, 38-54. New Delhi: Indraprastha Press. pp.47

³ Ruether, Rosemary Radford. 1997. "Ecofeminism: First and Third World Women." *Jstor* 33-45. pp.37

harmonize with the world that they are not different with each other.

Purusha and Prakriti

The world is produced and renewed by the dialectic play of creation and destruction, cohesion and disintegration and is revealed as first form Shakti. 'All existence arises from this primordial energy which is the substance of everything, pervading everything. The manifestation of this power, this energy, is called nature (Prakriti) [4]. Prakriti is evolved in Indian cosmology, Saṅkhya philosophy to show how women in rural India relate to nature. Nature is constructed by conjoining both Prakriti and Purusha. Prakriti is active and conscious. If masculine power keeps on destroying the nature, then Prakriti will also react back adversely. Following the Marxist idea of capitalism, it gives more rights to men to dominate over women and easily access to resources. With mechanistic approach machines are replacing labour but the wealth of ruling-class men has the power to exploit women by dismissing them from job in urban areas even if the women has more skill to do the same job. Similarly, man has separated them from nature by making it uniform and mechanistic. But Prakriti is interconnected with all beings, it maintains web of life. Women connection with Prakriti is very intimate as it produces life and make things grow. But 'With Adam Smith (a moral philosopher, a pioneer of political economy who was influenced by Marx), the wealth created by nature and women's work turned invisible [5]. Today, when we talk about increase in economic growth, we meant by it overall development of country. However, this development is turning to 'maldevelopment'. Maldevelopment means here development is not worthwhile as it is affecting environmental sustainability and women's rights and cultural freedom. Only men work is being recognised as productive, useful. Women labour work, household work of everyday where she fulfils everyone basic needs are considered as invisible, not valued. Existence of feminine is symbol of diversity, without feminine, masculinity will also not exist. Prakriti and Purusha may be referred to two different beings but the underlying reality forms unity in duality. Without one, other is nothing. Thus, this dualism is to be understood in positive sense.

Creation of Man and Woman as Equals

According to Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, after the manifestation of the Universe, Virāj in this relative world was not happy or satisfied. 'To remove that dissatisfaction, he desired a mate...' who can be '...able to take away that dissatisfaction, i.e. a wife [6]. And thereupon, he divided himself into two halves as a man and a woman. Both were created because one is incomplete without other like the two halves of split pea. With the union of the Virāj with his wife, humans were born. In Upaniṣad view, men and women are created equal and there is no hierarchy, but harmony.

In contrast with this view, the old biblical teaching advocates

that 'God created Adam, and when Adam was asleep, God took a rib of his hand and created Eve out of it [7]. This entails that 'Woman is only a rib of man, and that too dispensable rib! After removing that rib, man did not become less [8]. Therefore, this teaching creates a hierarchy in the world where man have given a higher status. However, the great teaching of Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad inspires the society with the idea of equality of man and woman- none superior or inferior to other. Because 'the nature of human beings as the Ātman. It is beyond sex differentiation. The ātman has no sex. The idea of masculine and feminine is only in the body and not in the ātman [9]. Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad promotes non-sectarian views and equality without any limiting adjunct. Despite these high teachings regarding unequal treatment, our society is still unaware of the fact that behind this manifestation of duality, there is unchanging reality and everything is only a transformation of mind or consciousness itself.

I will discuss further how western society examine this mind and its rationality. Whether this rational thinking is essential to be human or is it dangerous from the perspective of environmental science?

Western Culture: Rationality Presuppose Supermacy

Val Plumwood, an Australian ecofeminist philosopher and activist, in her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* describes how the rational way of thinking creates difference between human and nature, man and women, man and animals, masters and slaves. One is recognized as superior and other is defined as inferior. 'The concepts of humanity, rationality and masculinity form strongly linked and contiguous parts of this web, a set of closely related concepts which provide for each other models of appropriate relations to their respective dualized contrasts of nature, the physical or material, and the feminine [10]. Man is consider as a rational thinker with his power of masculinity and exploit the other like women, slaves, animals and this web or network further multiplies to other dualistic connections. This generates a hierarchy in which women and slaves are subordinate, they lack a power of thinking, opinion and decision making. Men as 'superior' being upholds his identity and disregard other identity as independent. He believes that he is the master of all beings because he has the supreme power of thinking and power which makes him independent but others do not have any individuality, their identity is dependent on him. Though this is a falsify notion no one is independent, every individual is dependent on each other maintaining the respect of every being, human or non-human. Ecofeminists stresses this distinction is further extended to racism and class hierarchy. 'We have to look at the total structure of the society-fused with racial hierarchy-and see how gender hierarchy falls within race-class hierarchy. This means that women within the ruling class have vastly different privileges and comforts from women in the lowest class, even though both may be defined

⁴ Shiva, Vandana. 1988. "Women in Nature." In *Staying Alive*, 38-54. New Delhi: Indraprastha Press.pp.37

⁵ Ibid, pp.42

⁶ Madhavananda, Swami. 14th Edition,2011. *The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. Kolkata: Trio Process.pp.69

⁷ Ranganathananda, Swami. First Edition,2005. *The message of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. Kolkata: Trio Process.pp.38

⁸ Ibid pp.38

⁹ Ibid pp.38

¹⁰ Plumwood, Val. 1993. "Dualism: The logic of colonisation." In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, by Val Plumwood, 41-68. London: Routledge Press.pp.36

in general sense as mothers, child raisers and sex objects ^[11]. For example- white women is leisure class lady and black women as sexually available object. This society perceive the other as a means in serving the needs of their own. Patriarchy dominates the feminine, nature, kill animals for serving their own ends. They use them as a means and that separate them as upper from lower. They try to separate themselves from continuity of relationship between human and nature by defaming the other as inferior. Thus, there is a need to change the perspective on man identifying himself as master and enslaving other for his own ends. The crisis can only be solved when we all live more in harmony with nature instead of trying to destroy it and making our slaves.

Defend of Rationality

Karen J. Warren defends the notion of rationality which is misunderstood by western tradition. For her, thinking is necessary for intelligence: rational and emotional and not for reasoning or for mastering over the world. 'Of course, in contemporary societies, which are thoroughly structured by gender, race/ethnicity, class and other forms of domination, no one can maintain anything like perfect adherence to an ecofeminist ethics ^[12]. she rightly mentions that we are bounded by society, our linguistic interconnections, our survival, using technology and other means that it becomes difficult to have an environmental friendly/perfect lifestyle. But one can reflect on experience to connect and understand the significance of nonhuman world/others. Rationality is crucial to understand the emotional significance towards the world, it goes beyond seeing the world only as instrumental. It expresses the caring attitude in relation to the other human and nonhuman word. The whole play is about language how one narrates his experience and it concerns philosophically and ethically. 'According to Marilyn Frye, the loving eye "knows the complexity of the other as something that will present new things to be known". It is not an invasive coercive eye that annexes others to itself ^[13]. A rational mind has emotions, thought and ability to perceive it. Human has dual emotions (love and anger), if one sees things with loving eyes and not with aggressive eyes he will able to relate with it. Though he will know that there is difference between human and nature but still he will respect the other. This loving eye can only bring "Unity in sameness" by eradicating all the difference. Now question arises, can religion help in transforming our egoistic self to holistic self?

Transforming Religion: To Move Towards Eco-Theologies

Lynn White's in his publication "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" criticizes the dualistic attitude of separation between humans and nature. He mainly criticizes Judeo-Christian as responsible for environmental crisis by constructing hierarchy between divine and human, human and nature. Some scholars feel that there is a need to re-read and analyse the original religious scriptures in examining the

relation between human and nature. 'Saint Francis of Assisi, often referred to as the patron saint of ecology, the Christian mystic and visionary Hildegard of Bingen, and the Prophet Muhammad in Islam, are recurrently referred to as prime examples for people to emulate due to the various ways in which they interacted with their surrounding environments ^[14]. Saint Francis of Assisi connect with nature like they are his brothers. He treats nature not different from himself. This way of explaining help people to understand their responsibilities towards ecology and move towards more holistic eco-theologies. But Ecofeminists investigated that this domination of man mastery over nature runs parallel to male domination over female (gender-discrimination). Ecofeminists Warren, does not focus on any particular religion but rather she tries to consider spirituality for answering the same.

Ecofeminsm and Spirituality

According to Warren, Ecofeminist spiritualities deserve serious ecofeminist philosophical attentions for number of reasons: Historically, Politically, Ethically, Theoretically and conceptually. As we have seen in these years, how the ecofeminism movement is emerging and evaluating the problems connected with nature. Largely, the third world women, indigenous people living close to nature are more attached to it. It is said that maybe it is because of some spirituality that they feel so concern or care about the nature. On daily basis, women renew their relationship of home with the cosmos by worshipping and watering tulsi, a sacred plant. They do not differentiate between nature and them and thus goes to any extent in saving it. For example- the Chipko movement in India or Women of All Red Nation in United States are the most highlighted political movement. And from these movements women get strength and inspiration to fight against all odds and patriarchal system.

Warren explains this spirituality path by Kierkegaard "leap of faith," "but this leap is not taken to resolve the "existential dilemma" (as Kierkegaard thought). It is taken to enter into the spiritual dimensions of human life ^[15]. The 'existential dilemma' here means as man is considered as rational and superior and he dominates over other beings, non-human animal if he is limitless, but he is not boundless, he is limited and that makes him follow the 'leap of faith' that there is some other absolute being who is infinite and with this he deconstructs his self and reconstruct it again. This deconstruction and reconstruction of self-concept is also there in Buddhism. David Loy in his talk about healing ecology emphasis in Buddhist tradition about sense of lack that motivates us to follow spiritual path. But we misunderstood this sense of lack by looking outside the world to full fill this 'lack'. Problem lies in the self. Rather we should say in 'sense of self' and that needs to be reconstructed. Buddhist plays emphasis on intention, improving our karma by generosity, loving-kindness and wisdom. And the central theme of Advaita also focusses on the same concept that when the self

¹¹Ruether, Rosemary Radford. 1997. "Ecofeminism: First and Third World Women." *Jstor* 33-45, pp.35

¹² Warren, Karen J. Warren. 2000. "Ethics in a Fruit Bowl" In *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, by Karen J. Warren, 97-124. United States of America: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. pp.101

¹³ Ibid pp.104

¹⁴ Nogueira-Godsey, Nina Hoel and Elaine. 2011. "Transforming Feminism: Religion, Women and Ecology." *Jstor* 5-15, pp.7

¹⁵ Warren, Karen J. Warren. 2000. "Surviving Patriarchy" In *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, by Karen J. Warren, 193-216. United States of America: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. pp.196

is understood, we will start caring for the others just like we care for ourselves and stop using them as instrumental value. 'Spiritual care is a part of what we can do, to maintain, continue and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible ^[16].

According to my view, though there is duality present everywhere in this world. But one must search for the underlying reality behind this dualism. The underlying reality is non-dualism and that we must search within our self. We all are interdependent on each other. There is nothing in this world that exist of its own. For this reason, we need to respect each other just as we care for the individual 'I'. Arguing about religion, there can be different methodology of connecting with divine but be it Indian scriptures or Western tradition, they enlighten self and urges harmony among all being. If we believe in the concept of creator (one absolute) then we must also respect that creation. We can only save environment from crisis when man start respecting the 'other' and stop exploiting the others for his own means.

References

1. Madhavananda Swami. 14th Edition, The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. Kolkata: Trio Process, 2011.
2. Nogueira-Godsey, Nina Hoel, Elaine. Transforming Feminism: Religion, Women and Ecology. Jstor. 2011, 5-15.
3. Plumwood Val. Dualism: The logic of colonisation. In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, by Val Plumwood, 41-68. London: Routledge Press, 1993.
4. Ranganathananda, Swami. First Edition. The message of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. Kolkata: Trio Process, 2005.
5. Ruether, Rosemary Radford. Ecofeminism: First and Third World Women. Jstor, 1997, 33-45.
6. Shiva Vandana. Women in Nature. In *Staying Alive*, New Delhi: Indraprastha Press. 1988, 38-54.
7. Warren, Karen J. Ethics in a Fruit Bowl. In *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, United States of America: Rowman and Littlefield Publisher, Inc. 2000, 97-124.
8. Warren, Karen J. Surviving Patriarchy. In *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, United States of America: Rowman & Littlefields Publishers, Inc. 2000, 193-216.
9. Warren, Karen J. Warren. What are Eco feminists Saying? In *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, by Karen J. Warren, United States of America: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2000, 21-41.

¹⁶ Ibid pp.212