

Eco-feminism as a Paradigm Shift in Theology

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Christian theology emerges in a particular context, by taking people's experience as a starting point. Most of the theologies emerged over the years failed to start from reflecting a particular contextual reality and address people's problems collectively. Western theology is full of patriarchal domination over women and nature. Indian Christian theology too, though taking Indian images, symbols, languages, ignored the problems of women and nature. Feminist theology, one of the variants of liberation theology, though starting from women's experience, does not necessarily concern itself with nature. Very few theologians have dealt with ecological problems from a feminist perspective. Dalit theology, which is an Indian liberation theology tends to exclusively focus on the problem of casteism and its victims. The interest of dalit movements in ecological problems now begins to emerge. Gabriele Dietrich feels that dalit women are more directly dependent on the environment as they have no access to property. Many dalits were traditionally landless. Though, dalit theology reflects these basic concerns of dalits and tries to find common ground with tribal theology, which articulates the concerns of tribal people in India who live with and by nature, it is crucial to note that ecological issue is now in the beginning stage of its theological reflection. We cannot, therefore avoid a felt-need of focusing on a particular context in formulating a liberative praxis oriented Indian Christian eco-feminist theology. This theology will challenge the traditional Christian theologies.

As the problems of women and nature differ from place to place and time to time, eco-feminism must become a local expression. In India where the dalit and tribal women are thrice oppressed, eco-feminism must emerge as a bold theological expression to challenge all forms of oppression. It emerges in a context in which they suffer, struggle and cry to find out where God is. In this struggle, they feel that a father God or a brother God or a male God or a God who has been pictured as taking care of humans cannot help. But a God who understands and participate in people's struggles collectively can be worthy of worship.

What is Eco-feminism?

Eco-feminism is not just a creation of women, drawing the concerns of both women and ecology. Charlene Spretnak goes more than a century back and cites the first issue of "*Audubon Magazine*" in 1887. The issue carried an article by Celia Thaxter titled "*Woman's*

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Heartlessness”, which explained the hardships the author met while trying to stop women using on their hats feathers and stuffed bodies of birds. Later many feminists while moving into the direction of eco-feminism, used Marxist ideas as an analytical category and pointed out that patriarchy was not just a cultural category but had a material base and that ruthless exploitation of nature was part of patriarchal capitalist development. In the mid 1970s, “*exposure to the nature-based religion*” particularly the link between Goddess and nature led to new reflections on eco-feminism. Then “*environmentalism*” influenced eco-feminism. More importantly, the environmental studies in the universities made women to discover the interconnectedness between women and nature. Only in 1974, the term ‘eco-feminism’ was coined by Francoise D’Eaubonne, a French feminist,¹ and in the 1970s and the 80s, it became so popular in the context of the struggles of women and environmental groups. She, in 1972 set up a project ‘Ecologie-Feminisme’ and coined the term ‘Eco-feminism’ and called women to lead an ecological revolution to ensure the survival of the planet. Many Conferences were being held in different parts of the world. Gabriele Dietrich points out that only in the 1980s the connection between feminism and ecology was made in a more thorough way.² She says that it was the Green Movements, which raised the ecological question in radically democratic ways, including a feminist perspective.

During the last several years, there has been growing international interest in both ecofeminist theory and practice. While this interest takes different forms, as there is no ecofeminist orthodoxy or unified party line, eco-feminists around the world do believe that there are important connections between the domination of women and the domination of non-human nature and an analysis of these connections must be undertaken in order to end domination.³ The connection between the words ecology and feminism is the basis of the word ‘eco-feminism’. This word is born of two struggles; one is the destruction of the natural world and the other is the oppression of women. It is a position that makes connections between the struggle for the dignity of women and respect for the different processes of life. Eco-feminism was an attempt to synthesise two separated struggles, feminism and ecology. Francoise D’Eaubonne writes:

“The reasoning is simple. Practically every one knows that the two most immediate threats of death today are over population and the destruction of the natural resources; fewer are aware of the entire responsibility of male system - the system as male – in creating these two perilous situations; but very few have yet discovered that each one of the two menaces is the logical outcome of the one of the two parallel discoveries which gave power to men fifty centuries ago: reproduction and their capacity of sowing the earth as they do women.”⁴

This term is used by a few scholars to refer to a feminism that connects oppression of women with ecological degradation. Vandana Shiva points out that women and nature are intimately related, and their domination and liberation is also linked. Maria Mies argues that the patriarchal understanding of man- the-hunter developed violence in his relationship with both women and nature. Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies write:

“Eco-feminism is about connectedness and wholeness of theory and practice... It is the same masculinist mentality which would deny us our right to our own bodies and our own sexuality, and which depends on multiple systems of dominance and state power to have its way”.⁵

According to Vandana Shiva, eco-feminism is the movement and philosophy which combines emancipation of women and emancipation of nature and non-human species. Eco-feminism as a diversified philosophical framework and worldview emerged through action and struggle and not just in academy only. It has emerged as a pluralistic, bottom-up movement across the world over the last few decades. She further says that more importantly, eco-feminism emerging together as resistance to globalisation, to trading away resource to violence and cruelty against animals and as right to safe and adequate food. Eco-feminism offers ecological feminist alternatives to values and instruments of capitalist patriarchy which put rights of capital above rights of nature and rights of people and which treats the provision of sustenance as 'unproductive and regards destruction and violence as highest forms of productivity and creativity'.⁶ By quoting a French theorist Michel Foucault, Lee Quinby emphasises "*eco-feminism as an example of theory and practice that has combated ecological destruction and patriarchal domination.*"⁷ Hence, he says that eco-feminism is a politics of resistance, which operates against power understood "*as a multiplicity of force relations*", decentred and continually "*produced from one moment to the next*".⁸ It targets the abuse of power at all levels and in all places. For Lee, eco-feminism is an alliance of 'women's freedom and ecology's struggle for planetary well-being'.⁹ Uma Devi while talking about 'Eco-feminism and the Ecologically sustainable development' in the Indian context says that eco-feminism considers that, (1) there is a distinct relationship between women and environment; (2) women have certain responsibilities which make them dependent on nature and (3) women have an extensive knowledge of natural resources.¹⁰ Thus women are considered both as users and as dependent on nature. Since women are considered to have special relationship with nature, they are found to be the greatest victims of environmental degradation, while at the same time having knowledge and experience to resist the technocratic destruction of nature and to replace it by a more human approach.

Chung Hyun Kyung says,

"People who share both feminist and ecological world views and participate in the movement for a feminist and ecological new world call themselves eco-feminists and their worldview eco-feminism."¹¹

She says that ecofeminists draw their resources for struggle from more egalitarian, body-affirming, nature-respecting religious, cultures and ideologies. They are searching for a spirituality, which promotes the immanence of God, the sacredness of this world and wholeness of body, sensuality and sexuality.¹² She says that they try to rediscover the holiness of matter, which has been prominent in many tribal and indigenous religions of the world. In their yearning for holistic spirituality, eco-feminism and cosmic spirituality can empower each other. According to Ivone Gebara, eco-feminism is a "*philosophy, theology, and wisdom and works with a unified understanding of life wherein each being and each vital process is absolutely interdependent.*"¹³ In this sense, she says that it proposes to go beyond the notion of 'conflict between the genders that is promoted by patriarchal and hierarchical' systems. Ivone Gebara further argues that on the one hand, we need to consider, women's special struggle for their freedom, equality, and self-determination in every culture, on the other hand, to see the 'feminine' as an oppressed reality of all human life and all biological systems, which are both masculine and feminine. These two aspects are absolutely linked in the ecofeminist perspective.¹⁴ Eco-feminism advocates an inclusive philosophical position

that has been observed from all natural processes. Ecofeminist actions are aimed at the preservation of the life of present and future generations, both male and female, in a human perspective and in a wide biological and cosmic perspective. Ecofeminism also emphasises the idea that all creations are one sacred body. But in contrast, patriarchal system, divide our social body into different parts. Each one dominates the other. This domination is present among persons, among different groups, among nations, cultures, ethnic groups, and in human control over nature. In patriarchal society, life is understood as a hierarchical process where each one destroys the other in order to save the individual.

Ivone Gebara observes that eco-feminism also denounces the new forms of division resulting from the economic system, particularly from multi-national corporations that have succeeded in destroying natural resources and manipulating different cultures and environments in order to produce and sell more goods.¹⁵ These corporations are able to go beyond nations, cultures, and differences. They do not perceive the connectedness and interdependence of everything, and continue to be hostile to women, poor and nature, considering everything as an object to conquer. According to Anne Primavesi, as a philosophy, eco-feminism brings together a wide range of inter-connected concerns, including issues of gender, race and class, while stressing the crucial role played in environmental degradation by the logic of patriarchal domination.¹⁶ She further says that as a form of global activism, eco-feminism aims to educate consumers, environmental organizations and policy-makers about the complex web of inter-relationships between all living organisms and their environment. It teaches the interdependence of human and environmental development and also it is engaged in action appropriate to the environmental context. It educates by offering a feminist critique of the inter-relationship of social and political forms of domination, in particular that of man over woman and nature.

Different Approaches of Eco-feminism

However, there are some differences in the approaches of feminists who take different positions to respond in restoring the nature and the quality of the life of women. Ecofeminists take different approaches to counteract the issues of women and ecology. For liberal feminists, environmental problems are outcome of rapid exploitation of natural resources and the failure to regulate pesticides and other pollutants. They feel that women like men contribute to the improvement and conservation of the environment. The second wave of feminism known as Radical/Cultural eco-feminism, analyses environmental problems from within its critique of patriarchy and offers alternatives¹⁷ for the liberation of both women and nature. Radical ecofeminists hold the view that women and nature have been mutually associated and devalued in western culture and that both can be elevated and liberated through 'political action'.¹⁸ For Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, cultural eco-feminism, is based on an understanding of the patterns of culture and consciousness that sustain a male domination of women.¹⁹ For Astrid, it focuses on the domination and control that are characteristic features of patriarchy. Astrid strongly feels that it explores how the domination of women is inter-connected with the domination of nature by stressing the links, historical, biological and experiential, between women and nature. Ynestra King says that cultural feminists celebrate the life experience of the 'female ghetto' which they see as a source of female freedom rather than subordination.²⁰ For Ynestra King cultural feminists have been the major proponents of the identification of women with nature and feminism with ecology. It is interesting to note that they have celebrated the

identification of women with nature in music, art, literature, poetry, covens, and communes.²¹ Particularly for Third World women, opposing racism and genocide and encouraging ethnic pride are agendas while they struggle against sexism in their own communities. Ynestra King further says that the connecting of women and nature has lent itself to a romanticization of women as good and as apart from all the dastardly deeds of men and culture. So the women's spirituality movement is becoming more sophisticated and diverse as the Third World women articulate a powerful feminism emerging from their experience in the crucible of multiple oppression.²² Therefore, eco-feminism has become a more holistic feminism, which links all issues of personal and planetary survival. Social eco-feminism is based on the social ecology of Murray Bookchin,²³ which envisions a revolutionary social change, a society of decentralised communities in which women emerge as free participants in public life. They are, against the oppressive capitalistic patriarchy and try to eradicate this for human liberation and the survival of the planet. According to Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, social ecofeminists tend to emphasise the social and political aspects of eco-feminism rather than the personal and spiritual, although some are also critical of the political/spiritual division.²⁴ Socialist eco-feminism is not yet a movement, but a feminist transformation of socialist ecology²⁵ which, treats women as producers and reproducers of life. This approach treats nature not as passive object but an active subject. Also it "*offers a stand point to analyse social and ecological transformations and suggests social action that will lead to the sustainability of life and a just society.*"²⁶ Also Carolyn Merchant in her article on 'Eco-feminism and Feminist Theory' points out that for socialist eco-feminism, environmental problems are rooted in the rise of capital patriarchy and the ideology that the earth and nature can be exploited for human progress through technology.²⁷ She further argues that historically, the rise of capitalism eroded the subsistence-based farm and city workshop in which production was oriented toward use values and men and women were economic partners. The result was a capitalist economy dominated by men and a domestic sphere in which women's labour in the home was unpaid and subordinate to men's labour in the market place. Socialist feminism incorporates many of the insights of radical feminism, but views both nature and human nature as historically and socially constructed. Like radical feminism, socialist feminism is critical of mechanistic science's treatment of nature as passive and of its male-dominated power structures.

Another approach is 'ecological feminism' which is the organic forging of a genuinely anti-dualistic, or dialectical, theory and practice according to Ynestra King.²⁸ Ynestra King argues that no previous feminism has addressed this problem adequately, hence the necessity of eco-feminism. Also, rather than succumb to nihilism, pessimism, and an end to reason and history, it is better to enter into history, to a genuinely ethical thinking – where one uses mind and history to reason from the 'is' to the 'ought' and to reconcile humanity with nature, within and without. This is the starting point for 'eco-feminism'.²⁹ She further says that each major contemporary feminist theory, liberal, social, and cultural, has taken up the issue of the relationship between women and nature. Each in its own way has capitulated to dualistic thinking. But, she points out that, eco-feminism takes from socialist feminism the idea that women have been 'historically' positioned at the biological dividing line where the organic emerges into the social. For her, the domination of nature originates in society and therefore must be resolved in society. Thus, it is the embodied woman as social historical agent, rather than as a product of natural law, who is the subject of eco-feminism.³⁰ But the weakness of

socialist feminism's theory of the person is serious from an eco-feminist standpoint. Ynestra King says that an ecological feminism calls for a dynamic, developmental theory of the person – male and female – who emerges out of non-human nature, where difference is neither reified nor ignored and the dialectical relationship between human and nonhuman nature is understood.³¹ According to Heather Eaton, ecological feminism comprises analysis, critique, and vision, and is the study of and the resistance to the associated exploitation and subjugation of women and the earth.³² It is clear that there are different ideas and approaches about eco-feminism. All these make eco-feminism a movement of resistance, which struggles against any form of ill treatment and work for the well being of both women and nature.

Challenges of Eco-feminism

Eco-feminist theories are based on recognition of the way context shapes our understanding, explanations, and interpretations of the world. In addition, eco-feminist theories stress the importance of concrete and contextual “*mutual identification and mutual affirmation*”³³ of interdependence and compassion. More importantly, ecofeminists recognise that claims to knowledge are always influenced by the values of the culture in which they are generated. Also they believe that facts are theory-laden, theories are value-laden, and historical and philosophical ideologies, social norms, and individual processes of categorisation mold values.³⁴ It is also important to note that, eco-feminism not only addresses the issues of women and nature but also considers the socio-economic-cultural and political discrimination as root causes of the problems faced by women and nature. Rosemary Radford Ruether articulates the link between women and nature in patriarchal culture. She focused on dualisms that characterise patriarchy. She believes that this Western patriarchy made the hierarchical dualism³⁵ in which men master nature, not by imposing themselves on it and exalting it as an independent divine power, but by subordinating it and linking themselves with a transcendental power beyond nature, which is pictured as male. They identify their origin and nature with the transcendental power and by this elevating themselves over women and nature. Gabriele Dietrich analyses this problem from the perspective of capitalistic model of production process³⁶ and finds an affinity between subordination of women and subjugation of nature. In this analysis, she discovers an affinity between subjugation of nature and “*housewifation*’ which ‘*contributes to the invisibility of women’s work and disempowers women in the labour market as “supplementary” earners.*”³⁷ She says that this is upheld by violence and cultural exploitation.

“The primary mechanism of exploitation is based on sexual division of labour extended by neo-colonial division of labour. Free wage labour, the classical proletariat, is a shrinking category more and more made obsolete by mechanisation, while the informal work force is expanding.”³⁸

Eco-feminism challenges the Aristotelian dualism of mind/body; spirit/flesh; culture/nature; men/women which have informed much of western patriarchal thinking. Also it challenges western patriarchal philosophies, which legitimized the domination of men over women and the domination of human over nature, based on gender, race, class and caste. The consequences of these philosophies are colonial expansion, growth of capitalistic industrial development, and exploitation of the work of the poor in the society, and the violence and injustice against women. Eco-feminism recognises that all things, as integral parts of a viable

eco-system, are considered to have rights. This paradigm offers an alternative vision of hope and calls for a recovery of the feminine principle, as respect for life in nature and society seems to be the only way forward, the only hope for the world. *“It is a challenge, coming out of women’s lived experiences by not only weeping, with nature, for deliverance and freedom but out of years of organized resistance against senseless destruction.”*³⁹

K.C.Abraham identifies that the root of this problem lies (1) in the dominant development paradigm and (2) the worldview of modernism.⁴⁰ The driving force of a capitalistic development model is profit and so it encourages consumerism. A capitalist model, in Indian experience increased marginalisation of weaker sections, because the capital is invested in the industrial sector in the urban areas which led to the impoverishment of the traditional sector in the rural areas. Feminists call this type of development ‘mal-development’. They create counter-trends of the paradigm of what men call ‘modern development’. K.C.Abraham writes:

“The feminist criticism of science was initially directed against social sciences but it is now directed also towards natural sciences and its central paradigm, its underlying worldview, its anthropology, its methods and its application.”⁴¹

The earlier philosophy of ‘modernism’⁴² that technology would solve all human problems has been proven wrong, rather it created serious problems to our planet. Eco-feminism criticizes this view as ‘projection of western man’. They hold the view that it is the western scientific mindset created this disparity between nature and women. Modern western science emerged out of a context of ‘anthropocentrism’ and ‘mechanomorphism’ and based on “reductionist view of life, on the ideology that all matter presents a body of facts that must be objectively evaluated, proved and then appropriated for humankind’s use.”⁴³ This view influenced the idea of development which has been understood in terms of economic growth. Patriarchal mind-set is responsible for associating women and nature as the inferior and the degraded, both of them to be appropriated, used, abused and discarded. These types of narrow views have been challenged by ecofeminists. Maria Mies calls this ‘myth of catching up development’, which is based on an evolutionary, linear understanding of history. In this concept of history, some men have reached evolution. Women will also reach this peak with a little more effort, more education and more ‘development’. Technological progress is seen as the divine driving force on this evolutionary process. In this myth, the white men became the role models to which women aspire. The problem in this mind-set is that the structures will not change, economy remains the same and so the exploitation continues. Dominant paradigm reduces women to mere consumers to buy more goods constantly from those who manipulate women’s desires and needs. Eco-feminism challenges this Vandana Shiva says,

“We perceive development as a patriarchal project because it has emerged from centres of western capitalist patriarchy, and it reproduces those patriarchal structures within the family, in community and through out the fabric of Third World societies.”⁴⁴

But Bina Agarwal criticises Vandana Shiva for not differentiating between women of different classes, and therefore considers that some ‘essentialism’ is involved in her argument. She further criticises Vandana Shiva for holding only colonialism responsible for the nature-culture-gender divide.⁴⁵ According to Bina Aggarwal, thereby the pre-existing bases of

economic and social inequalities in the Indian society prior to colonialism are ignored. Despite the criticism of eco-feminism, even those who are critical of it do not dismiss it. They only want to pose it in the total context.

Directions made Towards Eco-feminist Theology

There are few theologians who made significant contributions, in their own way, to eco-feminism. It is important to review them briefly here. Rosemary Radford Ruether rightly says, "*It must unmask the structures of social domination, male over female, owner over worker that mediate this domination of nonhuman nature.*"⁴⁶ To unmask the structures of social domination, people have to undergo an experience of conversion in their mind and attitudes towards nature, from supporting the profit of the few against the many. This will lead converting their minds to the nature. Rosemary Radford Ruether writes,

"Any ecological ethic must always take into account the structures of social domination and exploitation that mediate domination of nature and prevent concern for the welfare of the whole community in favour of the immediate advantage of the dominant class, race and sex. An ecological ethic must always be an ethic of eco-justice that recognizes the interconnection of social domination and domination of nature."⁴⁷

It is also important to ponder upon the new kind of relationship between nature and women. They are friends. Nature intervenes in women's matters and women intervene in nature. This model of 'friendship' must be developed when we do an eco-feminist theology.

One of the most insightful Christian theologians who linked theology, feminism and ecological crisis is Sallie McFague. In her book '*Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age*', she uses different models to depict God in relation to creation. She believes that "*What is needed is attention to the needs of one's own time. It is my contention that a theology that does not work within the context of the holistic view of reality can not address the needs of our time.*"⁴⁸ She considers the traditional, patriarchal and hierarchical models as irrelevant to the present context and new models need to be developed. She developed her theology in a nuclear age, around the image of the world as the body of God, God as mother, God as lover and god as friend. She compares the love of God to mother's love and what the mother God gives is life itself. God as the mother of the universe is interested in all forms of life. She argues that humanity consists of both male and female, and so if we have to understand God in terms of the image of God, then both male and female images are important. She writes,

"God as the giver of life, as the power of being in all being, can be imaged through the metaphor of mother- and of father. Parental love is the most powerful and intimate experience we have of giving love whose return is not calculated: it is the gift of life as such to others. Parental love wills life....parental love nurtures what it has brought into existence, wanting growth and fulfillment for all. This agapic love is revolutionary, for it loves the weak and vulnerable as well as the strong and beautiful...parental love is the best metaphor we have for imaging the creative love of God."⁴⁹

For her, the doctrine of creation comes from the model of God as mother. She highlights two views here, one is, God created out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) and the second is God created hierarchically with nature, but she says that these two views support dualism and so she

developed an alternative view that “*creation is ...physical event; the universe is bodied forth from God, it is expressive of God’s very being. It is not something alien to or other than God but is from the ‘womb’ of God, formed through ‘gestation’*.”⁵⁰ This implies that the universe and God are neither totally distant nor totally different.

In the second model, “*God as Lover*”, she boldly says, those who believe God as love find difficult to accept God as lover. She explains this model as “...*a God who relates to all that is, not distantly and bloodlessly but intimately and passionately, is appropriately called lover. God as lover is one who loves the world not with the fingertips but totally and passionately...*” This model implies that God loves the world and God needs it and God, as lover is interested in the well being of the entire cosmos. It also implies that God wants us to help to redeem the world, which is very much different from the traditional view of salvation. The third model of God, “*God as friend*” deals with the more intimate, free and reciprocal relationship. She says that the basis of friendship is freedom where as all other relationships are bound with duty or utility or desire. She writes,

“If God is the friend of the world, the one committed to it, who can be trusted never to betray it, who not only likes the world but has a vision for its well being, then we as the special part of the body- the *imago dei*- are invited as friends of the friend of the world to join in that vision and work for its fulfillment.”⁵¹

These three models of God can provide guiding principles for reorganization of economic and political structures, emulate loyalty and truthfulness, and sustain life, crossing the barriers of caste/tribal, class, gender, and human-non human differences.

Rosemary Radford Ruether, through her writings, interprets the predicament of the powerful medium of ‘body’ with its different socio-cultural-historical impacts in terms of the symbols of Christian faith. A careful reading of her writings reveals that her theological framework emphasizes the ‘body’.⁵² The metaphor of body is a common one and it is extremely valuable for it unites us to each and every body on the planet. She presents the metaphor of body as praxis for her theological mind-set. Through her theology, she enters into the traditional patriarchal church boundaries to search for an egalitarian model where both women and men, human and non-human bodies can equally enjoy the same face of God, the *imago dei*. She writes,

“Women are symbolized as “closer to nature” than men and thus fall in an intermediate position between culture as the male sphere and uncontrolled nature.... Female psychological processes are viewed as dangerous and polluting to higher (male) culture. Her social roles are regarded as inferior to those of males, falling lower on the nature-culture hierarchy.”⁵³

The ‘body’ metaphor explains the inter-connectedness between women and nature. Rosemary Radford Ruether more powerfully presents this metaphor, ‘body’ as the ‘icon of the divine’. In that she calls this metaphor *shekinah*: “Woman/body/nature, no longer as the icon of sin and death, but as the icon of the divine, the divine *Shekinah*, the Wisdom of God manifest, alive in our midst. *Shekinah* is the Old Testament *theophanic* expression, which indicates the presence of Yahweh in the creation. In the New Testament also, particularly in Paul’s writings ‘body’ concept is well explained as “body as the image of God”(1 Cor.15: 39). Paul uses different terms to denote different meanings such as *sarx*,⁵⁴ and *soma*.⁵⁵ The nearest Pauline term to Rosemary Ruether’s ‘body’ metaphor is *sarx/soma*. *Soma* refers not only to an organ

of the body, but also to the members together as a unity. It is the term very near to personality. This shows that the term soma, which refers to the personality and personhood, is very relevant to ecofeminist theology. This metaphor, therefore, is profound to explain the indwelling presence of God both in human and nature.

Sallie McFague in another book, *'The Body of God: An Ecological Theology'* moves on to develop an organic model of theology from the earth perspective which challenges the classical hierarchical, anthropocentric and andocentric, individualistic, dualistic models of theology and their complicity with the current ecological crisis. This book provides immeasurable insights to our concern. The model of the world as the body of God represents McFague's way of thinking of God's transcendence in an immanent way that is 'the world is our meeting place with God'.⁵⁶ She draws insights from feminism, science and ecology which suggest a way of thinking of bodily unity and differentiation that stresses the radical inter-relationship and interdependence of all bodies, at the same time as it underscores their differences. Her development of anthropology does not focus human beings only in relationship to God, but

"starts with our earthly context: our inter-relationships and interdependence with all other creatures on our planet as well as our important differences from other life forms... because the earth is our only home and the home of all other beings as well, ... we must share the space...with other human beings, other animals, and the natural world."⁵⁷

Her doctrine of incarnation that is the belief that God is with us here on earth is radicalized beyond Jesus of Nazareth, to include all matter: that God is incarnated in the world. "God is the breath or spirit that gives life to the billions of different bodies that make up God's body. But God is also the source, power, and goal of everything that is."⁵⁸ In the same way, the story of Jesus deepens and radicalizes us, "*The liberating, healing, and inclusive ministry of Jesus that overturns hierarchical dualisms, heals the sick bodies, and invites the outcaste to the table should in our time be extended to a new poor – nature.*"⁵⁹

Aruna Gnanadason draws on Indian religious traditions of *Shakti*, *Annapurna*⁶⁰ and *Aranyani*⁶¹ as symbols of power, nurture, and sustenance in her writings. Indian eco-feminist theology can draw enormous amount of inspiration in India. This provides an alternative vision of hope and calls for a recovery of the feminine principle, as respect for nature and society seems to be the only hope for the world. She brings about the Indian feminine concept of *Shakti* (energy, power) as an important image of God. In the pre-Aryan thought in India, nature was symbolized as the embodiment of the feminine principle. *Shakti* as the feminine principle of the cosmos, in conjunction with the masculine principle *Purusha* (human), *Prakriti* (nature) creates the world.⁶² Throughout the centuries, women have drawn their *Shakti* from *Prakriti*. Concepts such as *Bhumidevi* (goddess earth) and *Bhumatha* (mother earth) clearly emphasize this concept. Vandana Shiva quotes Itwari Devi who describes how they have drawn their *Shakti* from *Prakriti* to sustain their struggles,

"Our power is nature's power, our Shakti (power) comes from Prakriti (nature). Our power against the contractor comes from these inner sources, and is strengthened by his trying to oppress and bully us with his false power of money and muscle. We have offered ourselves, even at the cost of our lives, for a peaceful protest to close this mine, to challenge and oppose the power that the government represents. Each attempt to violate

us had strengthened our integrity. They stoned our children and hit them with iron rods, but they could not destroy our Shakti.”⁶³

Eco-feminist theology is a challenge coming out of the real living experiences of both women and nature and the years of organized struggles of resistance against destruction.

Towards an Indian Christian Eco-feminist Theology

Eco-feminist theology rethinks the whole western as well as Indian theological traditions and questions the hierarchy of human over non-human nature, hierarchy of men over women. In this process, a bold and radical change in the traditional methodologies must happen towards an eco-feminist paradigm shift in Christian theology in India. An eco-feminist theology must take into account the world of the suffering of women and nature, as well as their resources, expressing solidarity with their struggles and contributions.

Eco-feminism contributes to a proper direction to liberation theology. Eco-feminism must emphasize the inter-relatedness and inter-connectedness between women and nature as also between humanity and nature. Eco-feminism must be a comprehensive theology in its perspective of liberation, which will ensure the over-all liberation of women along with the eco-system, and prepare them sufficiently for the establishment of a just society. If inter-connectedness is the reality, there must be an openness between human beings and humans and nature. Throughout the history of humankind, God, woman and earth have kept their faithful roles as providers, protectors and nurtures of life. They have shared hardships to give life, to protect and to support the living beings. Grace N.Ndyabahika using the metaphor of birth observes:

“God rested from the work of creation on the seventh day. After giving birth to a baby, a mukiga woman (Uganda) should rest for seven days. Similarly, “mother earth” or “mother land” should rest for a couple of years after she has yielded crops and vegetables.”⁶⁴

This implies that life on earth will never be possible without God, woman and earth and without rest. They continue to struggle to preserve the wholeness of life and solidarity in diversity. God continues God’s work of creation and nurturing of life through the heart of the earth. In this way, they share in the motherhood status.

Struggle for open communities today must become aware of the need for redefining the dimension of inter-relatedness between humans and nature. Our traditional theologies must undergo tremendous changes. Our understanding of theology must be revolutionized. Theology must be understood in relation to ‘*life*’ in its totality, because we believe in the God of life. Kenith A. David writes, “When people choose life and struggle to realize its vast potential, they are struggling for the sacrament of life.”⁶⁵ He explains Moses’ exhortation to the Israelites, the choice between life and death (Deut. 30: 15-20) and says, “That has been the call of the creator God down the ages, the plea and hope of a God who wills life because of vulnerable love, and yet allows people made in God’s image to choose between life and death.”⁶⁶ Life as sacrament can be found in Ezekiel’s vision (Ezek.37: 1-14) of the valley of the dry bones which explains the deterioration of the life of the people of Israel. As the prophet writes that he was taken to a valley where there were many bones lying and they were very dry. Even after many centuries still people’s life appears similar and looks like dry bones, but they expect that the Spirit of God will give them life to stand together and assert their rights.

Life as sacrament takes a new meaning in the context of the valley of the dry bones. When people struggle to attain the potentialities of life, they are struggling for the sacrament of life. This sacrament of life calls for a shift from the anthropocentric theological paradigm to a "*Life-centred theological paradigm*" in which God's entire creation including women and nature will become the subject of theologising. The "*Life-centred theological paradigm*" is inclusive, because it brings all God's creation as all "*groaning for liberation*". Paul's analogy of the groaning of creation like a woman's pain at childbirth implies that for both the women and the rest of creation, liberation becomes their common expectation. This life-centered paradigm is a dialogical paradigm, because it will not draw upon a single woman's experience or ecological problem, rather it takes both into serious consideration and concentrates on the inter-dependence and inter-connectedness between women and nature. This dialogical paradigm will mutually enrich each other and critically correct each other and thus contribute to the '*life*' of God's whole creation. This paradigm will also use and draw new insights from various religious resources for sustaining and upholding '*life*'.

Eco-feminism considers land as a sacrament of God. The land is of great significance. Land is life, land is their very being as people, and it provides their identity. Land is sacred, it is their integral part of life and therefore of the God of life. The World Mission Conference in San Antonio in its statement mentions,

"For indigenous tribal peoples, the land of their birth, their ancestors, their history and their heritage is part of their personal and community identity, part of themselves. It is their existence, their life. They neither "possess" nor live on the land, but consider themselves an inseparable part of the land, enjoying the God created beauty, the essential goodness of their unique part of the universe... Their sacred stories identify themselves with the holy places and events, which occurred in the land the Creator has given them. To be deprived of by violence or oppression of person ancestral land is to be deprived of identity, freedom, self-determination and the fullness of life. Yet this is the broken status of millions of human beings – of indigenous tribal peoples around the world and of other peoples dispossessed of their lands."⁶⁷

The sacramental meal of the church is celebrated according to the example and the instruction of Jesus. Jesus prescribed the consecration of bread and wine and their distribution as the essentials of the sacrament of Eucharist for the Church. We are asked to do it again and again to remember his life and work. While participating in it, we are confronted by the glorified Lord not in his proper form but a symbolic form, which he assumes as the outward expression of his own self, both revealing and veiling him, the sacramental symbol of a meal. In this meal, the Lord makes present for us and applies to us the self sacrifice of his own life through which he accomplished the salvation for all- including nature. It is important to take the substances used at the time of Eucharist. Bread and wine are the produce of the land, which they are produced by hard work. Moreover, it is women who are responsible to make bread and prepare wine in every tradition. Making bread and wine is a domestic responsibility where women do these jobs. It is the women who grind the wheat or other grains everyday to prepare meal for the entire family. Toil and sweat represents – bread and wine. Jesus passed around the plate of bread and cup of wine. This signifies sharing of land resources. In some Church traditions, each family carry the bread and wine to the alter which shows that we offer our produce of the land in the hands of God for blessing and sharing. This emphasizes that

the women's work and the nature's products are used for sacrament. In this sense, eco-feminism becomes a sacramental theology.

People's relationship with natural environment is part of Indian spirituality. Lame appraised this spirituality to the level of the sacred relationship and says that alienation from nature is like alienation from God.⁶⁸ Gonzalo Castillo-Cardenas writes, "*Lame was concerned about Indians' alienation from the land imposed upon them by the partition, distribution, and eventual sale of Indian reservations... He was keenly aware of the fact that for the Indians to survive with dignity depended upon the possibility to survive with land, because "land is not only the fruit of our work, the source of our food, but also the core of our social organization."*⁶⁹ The struggle of the people for land is their struggle for life. Land and life, therefore, are sacred and sacraments – "the visible sign of invisible grace". This very faith sustains their continuous struggles.

The faith that life and land as sacraments provide a new ecumenical vision for Christian theology. It avoids fragmentation of theology, but moves toward an ecumenism "*the household of God*". This understanding will replace our history-based spirituality into life centred spirituality with the emphasis not on just the redemption of humans, but on all those who have life. This theology is future-oriented not in the traditional sense of human's expectations of heaven and hell after death, but provides future responsibility for the humanity not to plunder the resources from the future generations. Eco-feminism is a missionary theology, because it acknowledges God's mission as holistic and cosmic in nature. Its aim is not geographic, territorial and numerical expansion, but transformation of the whole cosmos. In such a cosmic mission, God's entire creation including women and nature interpenetrate each other, uphold each other, strengthen each other and sustain each other. Thus, eco-feminism demands a new language for theology. Dorothee Solle says that the modern theology is influenced by rational language, but we need a language, which expresses the love of God in the context of the crisis women and nature face.⁷⁰ Eco-feminism here challenges Christian theology to go beyond rationalism. Then the theology of eco-feminism will emerge as an authentic, inclusive, and praxis-oriented Indian Christian liberative living theology.

NOTES

1. Carolyn Merchant, "Eco-feminism and Feminist Theory", in *Reweaving the World, The Emergence of Eco-feminism*, (ed), by Irene Diamond, p.100. See also Margaret Shanthi, "Eco-Feminism –An Update", in *God's Image, Journal of Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology*, Vol. 19. No.3, Sep 2000, p.2. The term 'eco-feminism' highlights the nexus between women and nature, our worldview, God concept, cosmology, and social justice. This nexus between women and nature has been debated by feminists with differing ideologies as diverse as the brands of feminism they espouse. Anne Primavesi says that the term 'eco-feminism' was coined by the French writer Françoise D'Eaubonne and introduced in her book on 'Le Feminisme ou la mort' published in 1974. She says that Françoise used it for a particular kind of ecological movement in which women's consciousness of oppression is the main driving force. See Anne Primavesi, "Eco-feminism", in *An A to Z of Feminist Theology*, (ed), by, Lisa Isherwood & Dorothea McEwan, England: Sheffield Academic Press, Ltd., 1996, p.45.
2. Gabriele Dietrich, "Ecology and Economy – Perspectives and Responses from Women's Movement in Women's Studies", in *Perspectives on Food Security and Survival*, (ed), by Gabriele Dietrich, Madurai: IAWS C/o ASMITHA & Centre for Social Analysis, 2000, p.100.
3. Lori Gruen, "Toward an Eco-feminist Moral Epistemology", in *Ecological Feminism*; (ed), by, Karen J. Warren, London and New York: 1994, p.120.

4. Francois D'Euabonne, "The Time for Eco-feminism", in *Key Concepts in Critical Theory: Ecology*, (ed), by Caroline Merchant, Jaipur: Rawat Pub., 1996, p.177.
5. Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies, *Eco-Feminism*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993, p.14.
6. See Vandana Shiva & Maria Mies, *Eco-Feminism*, pp.4ff.
7. See Lee Quinby, "Eco-feminism and the Politics of Resistance", in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Eco-feminism*, (ed), by, Irene Diamond and Gloria F.O., San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990, p.123.
8. *Ibid.*, p.123.
9. *Ibid.*, p.124.
10. S.Uma Devi, *Women, Work, Development and Ecology*, New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1994, p.50.
11. Chung Hyun Kyung, "Eco-theology, Feminism and African and Asian Spirituality", in *Ecotheology Voices from South and North*, (ed), by, David G.Hallman, New York: Orbis Books, 1994, p.176.
12. *Ibid.*, p.176.
13. Ivone Gebara, "Eco-feminism", in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, (ed), by, Letty. M.Russell & Shannon Clarkson, Louisville, U.S.A: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989, p.76.
14. *Ibid.*, p.76.
15. *Ibid.*, p.77.
16. See Anne Primavesi, "Eco-feminism", in *An A to Z of Feminist Theology*, (ed), by, Lisa Isherwood & Dorothea McEwan, England: Sheffield Academic Press, Ltd., 1996, p.45.
17. Carolyn Merchant, "Eco-feminism and Feminist Theory", in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Eco-feminism*, (ed), by, Irene Diamond & Gloria F.O., San Fransco: Sierra Club Books, 1990, p.100.
18. *Ibid.*, p.101.
19. Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, "Making a path to the Womb: Eco-feminism and its impliactions", in *Ecological Concerns: An Indian Christian Response*, (ed), by, Joseph Madam & Jacob Kavunkal, Bangalore: N.B.C.L.C, 1998, p. 54.
20. Ynestra King, "Healing the Wounds: Feminism, Ecology, and the Nature Dualism", in *Reweaving the World*, (ed), by, Irene Diamond, p.111.
21. *Ibid.*, p.111.
22. *Ibid.*, p.111.
23. Carolyn Merchant, *Earth Care, Women and the Environment*, New York: Routledge, 1995, p.14.
24. Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, "Making a Path to the Womb: Eco-feminism and its Implications", in *Ecological Concerns: An Indian Christian Response*, (ed), by, Joseph Madam & Jacob Kavunkal, Bangalore: N.B.C.L.C, 1998, p.55.
25. *Op.cit*, Carolyn Merchant, p.15.
26. *Op.cit*, Carolyn Merchant, p.15.
27. See Carolyn Merchant, "Eco-feminism and Feminist Theory", in *Reweaving the World, The Emergence of Eco-feminism*, (ed), by, Irene Diamond & Gloria Feman Orenstein, U.S.A; Sierra Club Books, 1990, p.103.
28. Ynestra King, "Healing the Wounds: Feminism, Ecology, and the Nature / Culture Dualism", in *Reweaving the World*, (ed), by, Irene Diamond & Gloria F.Orenstein, p.116.
29. *Ibid.*, p.116.
30. *Ibid.*, pp.116-117.
31. *Ibid.*, p.117.
32. Heather Eaton, "Ecological – Feminist Theology, Contribution and Challenges", in *Some Questions on Feminism and its Relevance in South Asia*, (ed), by, Kamla Bhasin & Nighat Said Khan, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1986, 1999, p.77.
33. Lori Gruen, "Toward an Eco-feminist Moral Epistemology", in *Ecological Feminism*, (ed), by, Karen J.Warren, p.124.
34. *Ibid.*, p.124.
35. Aruna Gnanadason, "An Eco-feminist Theology" in *An Ecological Worldview for the Mission of the Church*, (ed), by, Bennet Benjamin, Nagpur: NCCI, N.Y., p.32.
36. Gabriele Dietrich, "Ethnicity, Ecology &Feminism", in *AJTR*, VI, 1, Jan-June, 1993, p.38.
37. *Ibid.*, p.38.

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38. *Ibid.*, p.38.
39. *Ibid.*, p.33.
40. K.C.Abraham, "Eco-Feminism: Some Theological Challenges", in *Women in the Church and Society*, (ed), by, Prasanna Kumari, Chennai: GLTC & RI, 1999, pp. 102-103.
41. *Ibid.*, p.104.
42. Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993, p.46.
43. Aruna Gnanadason, "An Eco-Feminist Theology", in *An Ecological Worldview for the Mission of the Church*, (ed), by, Bennet Benjamin, Nagpur: NCCI, N.Y, p.31.
44. Vandana Shiva, "Let Us Survive: Women, Ecology and Development", in *Sangarsh, An Occasional Journal of Vimochana*, Bangalore: 1986, p.15.
45. Bina Aggarwal, "The Gender and Environment Debate: Lessons from India", in *Feminist Studies*, 18, No.1, Spring 1992, pp.119-157.
46. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1983, p.85.
47. *Ibid.*, p.91.
48. See Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, nuclear Age*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987. Pp. X-XI.
49. *Ibid.*, p.103.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
51. *Ibid.*, p.165.
52. See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, and London: SCM Press Ltd., 1983, p.203.
53. *Ibid.*, p.72.
54. References: Gal.4: 13ff, 1 Cor.7: 28, 2 Cor.12: 7, Col.2: 1 &5, Eph.2: 15, Col.1: 22
55. References: Gal.6: 17, 1 Cor. 9: 27, 13: 3, 2 Cor.10: 10, Col.2: 23.
56. Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*, and Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993, p.vii.
57. *Ibid.*, p.34.
58. *Ibid.*, p.xi.
59. *Ibid.*, xii.
60. Annapurna is a vegetation goddess, a vital force concerned with the growth of crops. Her body is the earth, source of plant life and all that lives. See. Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive*, Delhi: Kali for Women, 1988, pp.55-56.
61. Aranyani is the goddess of the forest, the primary source of life and fertility. Forests have been worshipped as Aranyani. See. Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive*, and Delhi: Kali for Women, 1988, pp.55-56.
62. Aruna Gnanadason, "Towards a Feminist Eco-Theology for India", in *Women Healing Earth*, (ed), Rosemary Radford Ruether, and London: SCM Press, 1996, p.75.
63. See Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*, Delhi: Kali for Women, 1988, p.
64. Grace N.Ndyabahika, "The Earth Belongs to God: Women's Place in Creation", in *Concern for Creation: Voices on the Theology of Creation*, (ed),Viggo Mortensen, Uppsala: Svenska Kyrkan, 1995, p.91.
65. Kenith A.David, *Sacrament and Struggle: Signs and Instruments of Grace from the Downtrodden*, Geneva: WCC Mission Series, 1994, p.46.
66. *Ibid.*, p.50.
67. The San Antonio Report, p.45.
68. Cited in Gonzalo Castillo-Cardenas, *Liberation Theology from Below: The Life and Thought of Manuel Quintin Lame*, Maryknool, New York:Orbis, 1987, p.84. See also in Kenith A.David, *Sacrament and Struggle: Signs and Instruments of Grace from the Downtrodden*, Geneva: WCC Mission Series, 1994, p.65.
69. *Ibid.*, pp.65-66.
70. Cited from Dorothy Solle's book 'On Earth As In Heaven' by K.C.Abraham, "Eco-Feminism: Some Theological Challenges", in *Women in Church and Society*, (ed), Prasanna Kumari, Chennai: GLTC &RI, 1999,pp.102-103.