

# (Re)Defining Ecofeminism in India: Paradigm Shifts From the Ancient Period to the 21st Century

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Feminism, in its western universalistic sense, has long been a colonial and imperial project. It has, historically, undermined indigenous knowledge, and the way various communities conceptualized themselves, and their relationships with other entities. The imposition of Western frameworks, often as a civilizing act, resulted in the disintegration of traditional meanings and identities, resulting in a complete break with their past. As women were the bearers of culture and ways of life, this had the greatest impact on them. The tools that were readily available to them before, which helped them self-define themselves in relation to others, gradually disappeared under the onslaught of industrialization and modernity. Various religious, legal, and educational interventions ensured that the indigenous worldviews, which traditionally saw nature as an integral part of their being and women as its expression, were completely obliterated. This epistemic injustice can be seen in the case of eco-feminism, which was long ignored despite its effectiveness in reimagining human-nature relationships with its roots in ancient Hindu philosophy. Whether it is the Chipko movement in Uttarakhand or the Bishnoi community in Rajasthan known for their environmental awareness, they all draw their conceptual resources from ancient Indian thinking where nature or environment has always remained a feminist issue.

India is a place where the goddess, the female, the feminine aspect of life continues to be worshipped in an unbroken tradition across the land. That an ancient civilization surviving to this date over millenia continues the worship of the feminine should be cause celebre for the feminist movement in the west, instead we have the modern day feminists focus only on the faultlines or social ills magnified out of proportion by colonial and missionary accounts erasing any mention of this beautiful tradition which clearly influences a billion Hindus even in the 21st century. In India, eco-destruction is checked by various environmental movements such as the Chipko Movement in the Himalayan foothills. Large scale displacement is caused by hydroelectric projects such as Narmada Valley Project in Central India, the Koel-Karo in Bihar or the Silent –Valley Project in Kerala. Women have always played an active role in environmental movements that seek to prevent such cases of eco-destruction. Women in rural areas still associate themselves with nature. Science and development are understood as patriarchal projects both historically and ideologically. The scientific revolution in Europe removed all ethical and cognitive constraints against the violation and exploitation of nature. Women have challenged legitimization of the western exploitation of nature and tried to protect it as her 'Prakriti' – the life force which protects the earth. They have challenged the Western concept of profit making and accumulation of capital to their own indigenous concept of economics as production by sustainable means. Their ecological struggle is simultaneously aimed at liberating nature from uninhibited exploitation and themselves from getting marginalized. Therefore, one can truly notice the slow-but-steady transformations in India's ecofeminist narratives since times immemorial. The research seeks to redefine Indian traditional ecofeminism by analyzing its paradigm shifts from the ancient period to the 21st century with a focus on different time periods.