



## Nature and Women: A Unique Story of Struggle!

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“....I had to make my life happen”

**Adrienne Rich**

### **Abstract:**

The above extract from Rich's poem 'An Atlas of Difficult World': Poems 1988-1991, is a bewildering expression but I feel that it suits to my topic very well since the dilemma of nature and woman is the prominent issue, my research paper deals with. In the present scenario, when ecological imbalance has led to various destructive occurrences such as global warming, tornados, earthquakes, volcanic eruption and many more other such crisis, have compelled men to ponder about the remedial strategies to prevent this world from being smashed to nothing. Along with the ecological disasters one more significant happening should also be mentioned here which revolves around the trauma and plight of women which is not an unusual phenomenon worldwide. However it may sound bizarre how women and nature are considered alike. So through my research paper, I'd like to focus on eco-feminism, a term which establishes a co-relation between nature and women. My paper will delve in to how women and nature are under constant dominion of man with special reference to some eco-feminists who are widely- known for their writing on the relevant issues.

**Keywords:** ecological imbalance, destructive occurrences, feminists,





“O let the earth devour me quick on which I seem too fair,  
Or else this shape which is my harm by changing straight appear.”  
This Prayer scarce said, her sinews waxed stark,  
And therewithal about her breast did grow a tender bark.  
Her hair was turned into leaves, her arms in boughs did grow;  
Her feet that were erewhile so swift now rooted were as slow.  
Her crown became the trop; and thus of that she erst had been  
Remained nothing in the world but beauty fresh and green. (Ovid 2002:50)

The above poetic stanza has been extracted from “The Myth of Apollo and Daphne”, as told in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Daphne who is being transformed into a tree is rescued by Apollo who follows her through woods. This stanza can be the most suitable example of co-relation between women and nature. As my research paper delves into the essentials of Eco-feminism I find no better example other than that for the introductory part of my paper. My research paper aims at eco-feminism with the special reference of the available literature written by some widely known eco-feminists such as Adrienne Rich, a well-known prolific American eco-feminist and Grete Gard who has contributed a lot to this theory of feminism. The term Eco-feminism was first coined in 1974 by Françoise d’Eaubonne. He was an anthropologist who in 1974 mentioned that women are considered inferior in all the cultures as women are seen as being closer to nature than men” (12) The idea behind the Feminist movement which emerged in the United States of America in 1960s was to abolish the oppression of women who were considered substandard to their male counterparts. Women’s identity and individuality was the discernible feature of this era however this struggle still continues in almost in the entire world. Over the passage of time, feminism has bifurcated into several new forms and Eco-feminism is one of them. How can ecological or environmental crisis be the integral component of feminism that deals with the issues related to women? “...eco-feminism’s basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature.” (Grete) In the present scenario, our society has been grappling with the issues like environmental crisis, racial battle and atrocities done to





women etc. Eco-feminism believes that women can't be liberated and emancipated without removing exploitation of nature. Different theories of feminism point out how detrimental patriarchal norms are for the rapid progress of our society but eco-feminism vehemently believes that such norms are inimical to everyone present in our society be it women, children, animals, trees or nature.

Eco-feminism is about the similarity of society's relationship with nature and women. In country, almost all the nature is regarded as Goddess that has female characteristics. She creates new life, like a mother helps her children and hence she is closer to women than men. Ortner said "Because of women's greater bodily involvement the natural functions surrounding reproduction, she is seen as more a part of nature than men" (1)

"There is no inherent need for a division of activities between women and men to yield subordinate roles for women, and psychological differences between sexes may be the product of family structure rather than reflecting innate differences." (2)

Adrienne Rich, a well-known and prolific American writer made the above statement in which she very clearly mentioned how women have different view of perception about environment and establishment of new city and their view point is at variance with men's. This is Rich's satire on modern world which comprises "huge buildings and skyscrapers", an entirely practical world without giving least attention to the issues pertaining to environment.

"I really do believe that women, when they're free to do so, care more about the environment that they live in, for whatever reasons, than men do. Houses or landscapes or cities-I like to think that if women were in charge of cities they would be much more habitable places. We'd build a city thinking about how people are going to connect with each other rather than about how power is going to be represented in huge buildings and skyscrapers and how money is going to pass from hand to hand." (ARP 118)

The similarities between women and Nature are innumerable and the intrinsic quality which is alike in both of them is patience and bearing capacity which leads to crisis. Since this perseverance and endurance is misinterpreted by this patriarchal society. Like nature, woman is also familiar with the power she has but she is stupefied and is in dilemma because her counterpart whom she has created and shaped has captivated and



subjugated. In the poetic stanza, Adrienne Rich voices the immense plight and trauma of being a woman because of patriarchy. As a woman knows she's endowed with certain powers but she is deprived of using those powers for her own sake. 'Authorities' here in the stanza refers to 'man'. Since she says this society is ruled and regulated by men and so is the woman.

"I am a woman in the prime of life, with certain powers,  
And those powers severely limited  
By authorities whose faces I rarely see. (FD 119-20)

Adrienne Rich mourns for the world is full of monsters and murderers who don't think a bit while murdering the humanity. She desires for a transformation (Polly N. Chenoy) "shrouded in a snowy blur" he is referred as a man who is an intruder who doesn't hesitate to outrage the modesty of woman. When I study the other aspect of this stanza by Rich, environment is being threatened by the same enemy who in disguise puts it at risk.

"Madness, suicide, Murder.  
Is there no way out but these?  
The enemy, always just out of sight  
Snowshoeing the next forest, shrouded  
In a snowy blur, abominable snowman (FD166)

Grete Gard finds a unique connection between women, animal liberation and environment since she says, "Another connection between feminism, animal liberation, and environmentalism has been made by documenting the effects of environmental pollution and degradation on the lives of women and animals." (Grete Grad) This statement made by Grete proves how depletion in our surrounding affects lives of women and animals badly. They are complement to one another.

"Out here I feel more helpless  
With you than without you  
You mention the danger  
And the list the equipment  
We talk of the people caring for

In emergencies-laceration, thirst-

But you look at me like an emergency (FD 149-50)

The abovementioned stanza describes the feeling of a woman who feels more helpless in the company of man. She expresses her repulsive opinion against man's dominion: this is the same plight woman and nature are undergoing. She plainly avers that she feels more comfortable when she is not in man's company.

Grete Gard depicts the reasons why man's treatment with nature and women is derogatory, "Because it is identified with the "feminine," nature is regarded as existing to serve Man's physical needs (and the reverse). This association of nature and women in Patriarchal societies underwrites instrumentalism, whereby things are valued only to the extent that they are useful to Man." This statement by Grete suggests clearly things that man finds useful to him are valued and rest of the things are considered waste and of no use. Like Grete, Rich also opines alike on this issue when she describes what a girl feels after being rejected by her male counterparts.

'What a girl I was then' with a body "ready for breaking open like a lobster" (MS 41). This jarring crustacean image of the body as an object of consumption, a lobster frighteningly conveys a sense of the girl's self as something precious and rare offered to be consumed or elegantly sacrificed. Here the female is the object of consumption, a delicacy to be eaten and savored, then to be tossed out.

### **Conclusion:**

According to Warren, "oppression of nature and the oppression of women have important links, it is very necessary to understand this for the full understanding of the oppressions against nature and women suffered."

THE SALAD BOWL OF THE WORLD, gurr of small palnes

Dusting the strawberries, each berry picked by a hand

In close communion, strawberry blood on the wrist,

Malathion in the throat, communion,

The hospital at the edge of the fields,



Premature slipping from unsafe wombs,  
The labour and delivery nurse on her break watching  
Planes dusting rows of pickers. (AWD 3)

In the above stanza which is an extract from her poem An Atlas of Difficult World; 1988-1991, Rich presents the grim reality of the modern world which is grappling with the problems like pollution, violence and suffering and abuse of subjugated and marginalized people of our society. She discusses the squalid condition of poor people in the above lines. On the one hand man is rejoicing the development which has led him to the world of technology and modernization but on the other hand nature like woman is wailing at her loss since she is to live under man's dominion. The existence of the entire world is menaced by war, nuclear power, violence and many more threatening factors and the role of eco-feminism has lots of significance in this regard. Grete says, "Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature the way in which women and nature have been conceptualized historically in the Western intellectual tradition has resulted in devaluing whatever is associated with women, emotion, animals, nature, and the body, while simultaneously elevating in value those things associated with men, reason, humans, culture, and the mind." Women can define themselves only after they won't have to follow the predefined norms of the male chauvinist society and once they break away from the discrimination, no bar can stop them to unleash and unravel them to the world of opportunities and equality. The same treatment Nature is also expecting from human since exploitation has made Her exhaust and she also is looking up for a renaissance which is mandatory for her reunion with human. So this is the high time when woman along with the nature should be provided with their lost identity which is not only a vital issue for their survival but for the existence of the entire human race and our planet the Earth. In nut shell, I can say that study of eco-feminism endeavors to weed out gender oppression along with the wiping out oppression of nature to re construct a new feminist theory and practice that may help to establish harmony and unity between person to person and between human and nature.





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