

Ecofeminism and Women's Labour: Theoretical Reflections on Sustainability and Gender Justice

Gurpinder Kumar,

Assistant Professor, Centre for Women's Studies,

University of Allahabad, Prayagraj, UP, INDIA.

wsgurpinder@gmail.com

Abstract

Ecofeminism provides a critical framework for understanding the interconnected exploitation of women and nature under patriarchal, capitalist, and hierarchical systems. The present paper examines the relationship between women's labour, environmental sustainability, and gender justice, focusing on the often-unrecognised contributions of women's paid and unpaid work to ecological well-being, social reproduction, and community resilience. It explores how gendered social structures, unequal access to resources, environmental degradation, and exclusion from decision-making processes shape women's experiences of sustainability and ecological vulnerability. The present paper also adopts an intersectional perspective, recognising that gender inequalities are shaped by class, caste, race, ethnicity, geography, and other forms of social marginalization. Methodologically, the paper employs a qualitative, critical and integrative literature review approach based on secondary sources, including scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and reports from organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), UN Women, the World Bank, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The literature is thematically analyzed around ecofeminist critiques of patriarchal and capitalist structures, women's paid and unpaid labour, gendered environmental impacts, natural-resource governance, green employment, and gender-responsive sustainability policies. The analysis integrates ecofeminist and intersectional theoretical perspectives with existing policy and institutional evidence. The present review-based paper indicates that women's labour is an essential yet frequently undervalued foundation of ecological sustainability and social reproduction. It highlights persistent inequalities in access to natural resources, green employment, environmental governance, and decision-making. The present analysis suggests that meaningful gender justice requires recognition of women's labour, knowledge, and leadership through gender-responsive, intersectional, and participatory approaches to sustainability and environmental governance.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Women's Labour, Sustainability, Gender Justice, Environmental Governance, Intersectionality, Green Economy

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the accelerating environmental crises—manifested in climate change, biodiversity loss, resource depletion, and pollution—have exposed the limits of conventional development models and called for urgent rethinking of sustainability frameworks worldwide (IPCC, 2023; UNEP, 2025). At the same time, persistent gender inequalities continue to shape social, economic, and political landscapes, undermining the rights, opportunities, and well-being of women globally (UN Women, 2023). The intersection of these two urgent issues—environmental sustainability and gender justice—forms the core concern of ecofeminism, a theoretical and activist framework that explores the deep links between the domination of nature and the oppression of women within patriarchal and capitalist systems (Mies & Shiva, 1993; Gaard, 2017). This introduction elaborates on the growing recognition that achieving true sustainability requires not only ecological balance but also social equity, with particular emphasis on the often-unacknowledged labour of women in sustaining both ecosystems and societies.

1.1 Ecofeminism: Bridging Ecology and Gender

Ecofeminism emerged in the late 20th century as a critical response to environmental degradation intertwined with gender-based oppression. Pioneering scholars like Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies argued that the patriarchal worldview, which positions nature as a resource to be controlled and exploited, parallels the subjugation of women, whose labour and bodies are similarly commodified and marginalized (Mies & Shiva, 1993). This dual oppression stems from a broader system of capitalist patriarchy, where economic growth is prioritized over ecological and social well-being, and hierarchical structures perpetuate inequality along gendered and racialized lines (Salleh, 2020).

This framework challenges the dominant sustainability discourse that often treats environmental and social issues as separate or secondary concerns. Instead, ecofeminism insists on the inseparability of ecological health and gender justice, emphasizing that environmental policies must be grounded in an understanding of how power operates through intersections of gender, class, race, and ethnicity (Gaard, 2017). By foregrounding the perspectives and experiences of women—especially those in marginalized communities—ecofeminism broadens the scope of sustainability to include social justice, cultural diversity, and the rights of indigenous peoples.

1.2 Women's Labour and Sustainability

Central to ecofeminist thought is the recognition of women's labour, both paid and unpaid, as foundational to sustaining life and ecological systems. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2018), unpaid care and domestic work constitute approximately 9% of global GDP, with women performing nearly three times more unpaid work than men. This labour, which includes child care, food preparation, water and fuel collection, and household management, supports social reproduction—the daily and generational renewal of human life—and thus underpins the formal economy and environmental stewardship.

Yet, this essential work remains largely invisible in economic accounting and policy frameworks, leading to the systematic undervaluation of women's contributions and the reinforcement of gender inequalities (Folbre, 2021). The invisibility of unpaid labour also obscures the ecological dimensions of women's work, particularly in rural and indigenous communities where women's roles in managing biodiversity, agriculture, and natural resources are vital for environmental sustainability (Agarwal, 2010).

Beyond unpaid labour, women's participation in formal green employment and environmental governance is often constrained by structural barriers. Despite the rapid growth of green jobs in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and conservation sectors, women are underrepresented due to limited access to education and training, discriminatory hiring practices, and cultural norms that restrict their mobility and leadership (Kumar, 2022; ILO, 2018). This exclusion not only denies women economic empowerment but also weakens environmental outcomes, as diverse perspectives and knowledge systems are crucial for effective natural resource management and climate adaptation.

1.3 Gendered Impacts of Environmental Degradation

Environmental degradation and climate change disproportionately impact women, particularly those living in poverty, indigenous populations, and marginalized communities. Women frequently face greater exposure to climate-related hazards such as droughts, floods, and health risks, while also bearing the increased burden of coping with resource scarcity, food insecurity, and water shortages (UN Women, 2023). The gendered division of labour often means that women must travel farther to collect water and firewood or work longer hours to secure household needs, exacerbating physical and emotional stress (Dankelman, 2010).

Moreover, these impacts intersect with social inequalities, including race, caste, ethnicity, and colonial histories, creating layers of vulnerability that compound women's experiences of environmental injustice (Crenshaw, 1991; Salleh, 2020). For instance, indigenous women's traditional ecological knowledge, which is critical for conservation and sustainable resource use, is frequently marginalized by dominant development paradigms that disregard local practices in favour of industrial solutions (Kimmerer, 2013).

1.4 Intersectionality and Ecofeminism

An intersectional approach is indispensable for understanding the complexities of women's labour and environmental justice. Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), intersectionality highlights how multiple social identities and structural oppressions—such as gender, race, class, caste, and ethnicity—interact to shape unique experiences and inequalities. Ecofeminism integrates this perspective to reveal how environmental harms and social injustices are mutually reinforcing and require integrated solutions that address these intersections (Gaard, 2017).

This lens challenges the homogenization of “women” in policy and research, emphasizing instead the diversity of women’s roles, knowledge, and challenges in various ecological and socio-political contexts. For example, women in the Global South may face different constraints and opportunities than women in urban, industrialized settings, requiring tailored strategies for empowerment and environmental sustainability (Agarwal, 2010).

1.5 Towards a Gender-Inclusive Sustainable Development

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize the importance of gender equality (SDG 5) and environmental sustainability (SDGs 13, 14, and 15) as interdependent objectives. However, implementation often falls short of integrating these goals holistically, resulting in policies that overlook women’s labour and voices in sustainability initiatives (UN Women, 2023). Incorporating ecofeminist insights into development policy can transform these frameworks by valuing reproductive and ecological labour, enhancing women’s access to resources, and fostering inclusive governance structures.

Efforts to green economies and create green jobs must prioritize gender-responsive approaches that dismantle systemic barriers and recognize women’s expertise. This includes securing land and resource rights, providing education and training tailored to women, and promoting their leadership in environmental decision-making (ILO, 2018). Such measures not only advance gender justice but also enhance ecological outcomes by leveraging the full potential of women’s knowledge and labour.

2. Objectives

- To analyze the foundational principles of ecofeminism and their critique of patriarchal and capitalist structures.
- To examine the role of women’s paid and unpaid labour in ecological sustainability and community resilience.
- To explore the gendered and intersectional impacts of environmental degradation on women, particularly marginalized communities.
- To assess barriers to women’s participation in natural-resource management, green employment, and environmental governance.
- To identify gaps and propose gender-responsive and intersectional approaches for sustainable development and environmental decision-making.

3. Research Questions

- What key ecofeminist principles explain the relationship between gender inequality and environmental degradation?
- How does women’s paid and unpaid labour contribute to ecological sustainability and community resilience?
- How do environmental crises disproportionately affect women, particularly marginalized communities?

- What barriers limit women's participation in resource management, green employment, and environmental governance?
- How can ecofeminist and intersectional approaches strengthen gender-responsive sustainability policies?

4. Significance of the paper

The present analysis holds critical significance in advancing both academic discourse and practical policy development at the intersection of gender justice and environmental sustainability. Ecofeminism, as a framework, challenges dominant paradigms by linking the oppression of women and the degradation of nature, thus providing a unique lens to analyze sustainability issues through gendered and ecological justice perspectives.

Firstly, the paper highlights the often-invisible contributions of women's labour—particularly unpaid care work and community-based environmental stewardship—which are essential for sustaining both households and ecosystems. Recognizing these contributions is vital for crafting inclusive and effective sustainability policies that do not perpetuate existing inequalities.

Secondly, by addressing systemic barriers faced by women in accessing natural resource governance and green jobs, the present paper underscores the importance of gender-responsive approaches in the green economy. This focus is timely given the global push for sustainable development and climate action, which must integrate social justice to be truly transformative.

Moreover, the present paper's intersectional approach acknowledges that women's experiences and vulnerabilities are shaped by multiple social identities such as race, class, caste, and colonial histories. This nuanced understanding is crucial for designing equitable policies and programs that reach the most marginalized and empower them as key agents of change.

Finally, this research fills existing gaps in policy and academic literature by synthesizing ecofeminist theory with empirical evidence on women's labour and sustainability. It provides actionable recommendations for governments, NGOs, and international bodies aiming to promote gender-inclusive sustainable development.

In essence, the study contributes to building a just and sustainable future where environmental health and gender equity are mutually reinforcing goals.

5. Methodology

The present paper adopts a qualitative, critical, and integrative literature review approach to examine the theoretical and policy relationship between ecofeminism, women's labour, environmental sustainability, and gender justice. Rather than generating primary empirical data, the present paper synthesises existing scholarly literature, theoretical contributions, and reports published by recognized international organizations. This approach is appropriate for

examining an interdisciplinary field in which theoretical perspectives, empirical observations, and policy debates intersect.

The present paper draws upon scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and institutional reports addressing ecofeminism, women's reproductive and productive labour, environmental sustainability, gender and climate change, natural-resource governance, and the gender dimensions of the green economy. Particular attention is given to the contributions of Merchant (1980), Mies and Shiva (1993), Plumwood (1993), Federici (2012), Agarwal (2010), Gaard (2017), Salleh (2017), and reports of the International Labour Organization (ILO), UN Women, the World Bank, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The literature is analyzed thematically rather than treated as a collection of independent summaries. The present study focuses on five interconnected themes: (a) ecofeminist critiques of patriarchal and capitalist structures; (b) women's paid and unpaid labour and its relationship with sustainability; (c) gendered environmental vulnerability and community resilience; (d) women's participation in natural-resource governance and green employment; and (e) gender-responsive and intersectional sustainability policies.

An integrative approach is adopted because the purpose of the review is not merely to summarise existing scholarship but to bring together theoretical arguments and policy-oriented evidence in order to develop a broader understanding of the relationship between gender justice and environmental sustainability. Integrative reviews can synthesize diverse forms of literature and contribute to theoretical development by identifying relationships, convergences, tensions, and gaps across existing scholarship (Snyder, 2019).

The present analysis is further informed by an ecofeminist theoretical framework and an intersectional perspective. Ecofeminism provides the primary analytical lens for examining the interconnected marginalization of women and nature, while intersectionality facilitates analysis of the ways in which gender interacts with class, caste, race, ethnicity, poverty, and other structures of inequality (Crenshaw, 1991; Gaard, 2017).

The present paper does not claim to provide statistically generalizable findings. Instead, its contribution lies in critically synthesizing existing knowledge, identifying conceptual and policy gaps, and developing theoretically informed implications for gender-responsive sustainability. This approach is consistent with the understanding of review articles as independent scholarly contributions that analyze and synthesize an existing body of literature to identify theoretical developments, unresolved issues, and directions for future research.

A limitation of this review-based paper is its reliance on secondary sources. The paper does not include primary interviews, field observations, surveys, or other forms of original empirical data. Consequently, references to "findings" throughout the paper should be understood as findings emerging from the reviewed literature, rather than findings generated through primary

field research. Future research can complement this review through empirical investigations of women's lived experiences across different socioeconomic, geographical, and ecological contexts.

6. Review of Literature

- **Carolyn Merchant (1980):** Merchant's pioneering work, *The Death of Nature*, highlights how the rise of Western scientific rationalism and patriarchal ideology led to the commodification and control of both women and the natural world. She argues that this dual domination originates from a mechanistic worldview that separates humans from nature, thereby legitimizing exploitation. Merchant advocates for an ecofeminist ethic that recognizes the interconnectedness of life and calls for a holistic approach to environmental sustainability (Merchant, 1980).
- **Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (1993):** In *Ecofeminism*, Mies and Shiva connect capitalist globalisation to the destruction of ecosystems and the marginalization of women, especially in rural areas of the Global South. They emphasize how women's traditional knowledge and labour in agriculture and natural resource management are vital for ecological balance. However, capitalist models displace these practices, leading to ecological degradation and socio-economic inequalities. They call for decolonizing knowledge and empowering women as stewards of the environment (Mies & Shiva, 1993).
- **Val Plumwood (1993):** Plumwood critiques the deep-rooted dualisms such as male/female and culture/nature that underpin hierarchical thinking and justify domination. She stresses the need to dismantle these binaries to foster a relational ethic based on mutual respect and interdependence between humans and nature. Plumwood's work challenges prevailing philosophical frameworks and offers a vision for inclusive environmental ethics that integrate gender justice (Plumwood, 1993).
- **Silvia Federici (2012):** Federici foregrounds unpaid reproductive labour as a cornerstone of capitalist economies. She argues that women's unpaid care work—childcare, household tasks, resource gathering—is essential yet invisible in economic systems. Her critique stresses that recognizing and redistributing care work is crucial for achieving social and ecological justice. Federici links women's labour struggles with broader political movements for equality and sustainability (Federici, 2012).
- **Bina Agarwal (2010):** Agarwal's research demonstrates that women's active participation in community-based natural resource management improves both environmental and social outcomes. She documents how women's ecological knowledge supports sustainable agriculture and biodiversity. However, Agarwal points out persistent gender inequities such as restricted land rights and exclusion from governance, calling for reforms to ensure women's leadership and access to resources (Agarwal, 2010).
- **International Labour Organization (ILO) (2018):** ILO reports highlight that women perform the majority of unpaid care work worldwide, which is indispensable for

sustainable development. The 2023 *World Employment and Social Outlook* report stresses that green economy transitions offer significant employment potential for women but also reveal structural barriers like skill gaps and occupational segregation. The ILO advocates gender-responsive policies that promote decent work and recognize diverse forms of labour in green sectors (ILO, 2018).

- **Greta Gaard (2017):** Gaard extends ecofeminist theory by incorporating intersectionality, emphasizing how gender, race, class, and colonial histories intersect to shape environmental injustices. She argues that marginalized women often face compounded vulnerabilities but also possess crucial ecological knowledge and leadership potential. Gaard calls for inclusive, intersectional approaches to environmental justice that empower diverse communities (Gaard, 2017).
- **Ariel Salleh (2017):** Salleh promotes an eco-socialist feminist framework that integrates environmental and social justice struggles. She highlights the importance of participatory governance and collective action in dismantling capitalist and patriarchal structures. Salleh's work underscores the political dimension of ecofeminism, advocating systemic transformations to achieve sustainability and gender equity (Salleh, 2020).

Overall, the reviewed scholarship affirms that advancing sustainability and gender justice requires integrated frameworks that value women's labour, dismantle patriarchal structures, and promote equitable access and participation in environmental governance and the green economy.

7. Discussion

The findings of the present paper demonstrate that ecofeminism provides a particularly useful theoretical framework for understanding the interconnectedness of environmental degradation, gender inequality, and the undervaluation of women's labour. Rather than treating ecological sustainability and gender justice as separate policy domains, ecofeminist scholarship emphasizes their structural and material interdependence. The analysis of the selected literature indicates that women's productive, reproductive, and community-based labour contributes substantially to the maintenance of households, communities, and ecological systems, while dominant economic and institutional arrangements frequently render this contribution invisible. The discussion below interprets these findings in relation to the objectives of the study and the broader theoretical arguments developed by ecofeminist scholars.

7.1 Ecofeminism, Patriarchal Structures, and Environmental Degradation

The first objective of the present paper was to analyze the foundational principles of ecofeminism and its critique of patriarchal and capitalist systems in relation to environmental degradation and gender inequality. The findings indicate that ecofeminism challenges the hierarchical structures through which both women and nature have historically been positioned as resources available for control, appropriation, and exploitation. Merchant (1980) argues that the emergence of mechanistic and domination-oriented conceptions of nature contributed to

the conceptual separation of human beings from ecological systems. Within this framework, nature became increasingly understood as an object to be controlled, while similar hierarchical assumptions contributed to the marginalization of women.

Mies and Shiva (1993) further develop this argument by connecting capitalist expansion with the exploitation of natural resources and the marginalization of women, particularly in rural and agrarian communities. From an ecofeminist perspective, therefore, environmental degradation is not simply the consequence of inappropriate technologies or insufficient environmental regulation. It is also connected to broader systems of power that privilege accumulation, commodification, and centralized control over ecological sustainability and social reproduction. Salleh (2020) similarly situates ecological and gender inequalities within wider political-economic structures, emphasizing that environmental transformation requires attention to the social relations through which production and reproduction are organized.

The findings consequently support the central ecofeminist proposition that environmental justice cannot be separated from social justice. Plumwood (1993) is particularly important in this context because she critiques dualistic modes of thought—such as male/female, culture/nature, reason/emotion, and human/nonhuman—that create hierarchical relationships between supposedly opposing categories. Such dualisms are significant because they do not merely describe difference; they frequently establish relations of superiority and inferiority. Ecofeminism seeks to challenge these conceptual structures by emphasizing interdependence, relationality, and mutual responsibility.

Thus, the first research question concerning the theoretical relationship between patriarchy, environmental degradation, and gender inequality can be answered by recognizing that these phenomena are connected through systems of domination that devalue both ecological processes and forms of labour associated with care, subsistence, and social reproduction. Ecofeminism consequently expands the meaning of sustainability from environmental conservation alone to a broader concern with the organization of social, economic, and ecological life.

7.2 Women's Unpaid Labour as an Invisible Foundation of Sustainability

The second objective focused on examining the role of women's labour, particularly unpaid care work and formal employment, in sustaining ecological balance and advancing sustainability. The findings strongly indicate that unpaid labour is not peripheral to economic and ecological systems; rather, it constitutes one of their foundations. Women's unpaid activities include childcare, food preparation, household management, water collection, fuel collection, and other forms of reproductive and care work. These activities contribute directly to social reproduction by maintaining the everyday conditions necessary for individuals, families, and communities to function.

Federici (2012) argues that reproductive labour is indispensable to capitalist production even though it is frequently excluded from conventional definitions of economically productive work. This observation has important implications for sustainability debates. When care work is excluded from economic valuation, the contribution of women to sustaining human well-being is obscured. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2018) similarly emphasises the enormous global significance of unpaid care work and the disproportionate share undertaken by women.

The invisibility of this labour creates a conceptual problem within conventional sustainability frameworks. Economic indicators generally privilege activities that are monetized and exchanged within markets, whereas substantial amounts of labour performed within households and communities remain outside formal accounting systems. Consequently, a system may appear economically productive while simultaneously depending upon extensive unpaid labour. Folbre (2021) demonstrates the importance of recognizing care as an economic and social resource rather than treating it simply as a private household responsibility.

From an ecofeminist perspective, the issue extends beyond economic valuation. In many rural and indigenous contexts, reproductive labour overlaps with ecological labour. Women may be involved in food production, seed preservation, water management, collection of biomass, household resource management, and biodiversity-related practices. Agarwal (2010) demonstrates the importance of women's participation in community-based natural-resource management, further emphasizes the relationship between gender, environmental knowledge, and resource governance.

The findings therefore suggest that sustainable development policies need to move beyond the narrow distinction between "economic" and "non-economic" labour. Recognizing unpaid care and ecological work as socially valuable forms of labour would make sustainability frameworks more comprehensive. However, recognition should not mean simply assigning monetary value to every form of care. It should also involve redistribution of responsibilities, improved public services, social protection, and greater institutional support for those undertaking essential care work.

7.3 Women's Ecological Knowledge and Community Resilience

The analysis also demonstrates that women are not merely passive victims of environmental degradation. They frequently possess valuable ecological knowledge and participate in everyday practices that contribute to community resilience. This finding is particularly significant for the second and third objectives of the study because it connects women's labour with environmental stewardship and resilience.

Agarwal (2010) shows that women's participation in natural-resource institutions can influence both social and ecological outcomes. Women's knowledge is often developed through repeated engagement with forests, agricultural systems, water resources, seeds, food systems, and

household provisioning. Such knowledge may not always be formally recognized by scientific or governmental institutions, but its practical importance can be considerable.

Kimmerer (2013) similarly emphasizes the importance of Indigenous ecological knowledge and the relationship between human communities and the natural world. The marginalization of such knowledge can therefore represent not only a cultural loss but also a loss of potentially valuable approaches to ecological management. Mies and Shiva (1993) make a related argument by highlighting the ways in which dominant development models can displace local practices in favour of large-scale, market-oriented systems.

The findings consequently indicate that sustainability initiatives should not simply seek to include women as beneficiaries of environmental programs. Women should also be recognized as knowledge holders, practitioners, and decision-makers. This distinction is important. A policy that merely provides assistance to women without recognizing their agency may reproduce paternalistic relationships. An ecofeminist approach instead emphasizes participation, autonomy, knowledge, and collective decision-making.

Women's ecological knowledge should therefore be incorporated into environmental planning through participatory institutions that allow local communities to contribute to the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of sustainability initiatives. Such an approach is particularly relevant to rural and marginalized communities where environmental resources are directly connected to everyday livelihoods.

7.4 Gendered Consequences of Environmental Degradation

The third objective examined the intersection of gender justice and environmental sustainability, particularly the disproportionate consequences of environmental crises for women in marginalized communities. The findings indicate that environmental degradation does not affect all individuals or social groups in identical ways. Existing inequalities in access to resources, income, property, education, mobility, and political power can intensify women's exposure to environmental risks.

UN Women (2023) highlights the gendered dimensions of climate-related vulnerability, while Dankelman (2010) emphasizes how climate and environmental changes can increase the burdens associated with household provisioning and resource collection. Where women are socially responsible for securing water, fuel, food, and household resources, environmental scarcity can translate directly into additional time and labour burdens.

This demonstrates that environmental vulnerability is closely connected to the gendered division of labour. A drought, for example, is not merely an ecological event. Its consequences depend upon who is responsible for obtaining water, maintaining household food security, caring for children and older family members, and adapting household practices. Similarly,

resource degradation can increase the amount of unpaid labour required to maintain basic household well-being.

The analysis also indicates that environmental vulnerability must be understood intersectionally. Women do not constitute a homogeneous social category. Their experiences are mediated by class, caste, race, ethnicity, location, economic status, and historical relations of power. Crenshaw (1991) provides the conceptual basis for understanding such overlapping structures through intersectionality, while Gaard (2017) extends intersectional reasoning into ecofeminist environmental analysis.

Accordingly, policies based on the generalized category of “women” may fail to address the specific circumstances of marginalized groups. For example, the environmental challenges experienced by a rural woman dependent upon common resources may differ substantially from those experienced by an urban professional woman. Similarly, caste, class, Indigenous status, ethnicity, and geographical location can affect access to land, water, employment, institutions, and political decision-making.

The findings therefore support an intersectional ecofeminist approach in which environmental vulnerability is understood as the outcome of interacting ecological and social structures rather than as an inherent characteristic of women.

7.5 Barriers to Women’s Participation in Natural-Resource Governance

The fourth objective was to investigate barriers to women’s participation in natural-resource management, green employment, and environmental governance. The analysis identifies several interconnected barriers, including limited access to land and productive resources, exclusion from decision-making institutions, educational and skill gaps, discriminatory employment practices, occupational segregation, and socio-cultural restrictions on mobility and leadership.

Agarwal (2010) demonstrates that women’s participation in community forestry and resource governance is influenced by institutional arrangements, property rights, and the extent to which women possess meaningful decision-making authority. Mere representation within an institution does not necessarily guarantee substantive participation. Women must have access to information, resources, deliberative spaces, and authority if their participation is to influence outcomes.

This distinction between formal inclusion and substantive inclusion is especially important for environmental governance. A committee may contain women members while still operating through institutional practices that limit their ability to speak, vote, influence priorities, or control resources. Gender-inclusive governance therefore requires institutional transformation rather than symbolic representation.

The findings also indicate that barriers in environmental governance are closely connected with barriers in employment. Where women have limited access to education, technical training, land, finance, transportation, or professional networks, their entry into emerging green sectors may remain restricted. ILO (2018) notes that the transition toward greener economies has significant employment potential but may also reproduce existing patterns of occupational segregation if gender-responsive measures are not introduced.

Consequently, the green transition should not be assumed to be automatically gender inclusive. Without deliberate intervention, new industries can reproduce old inequalities. Women may remain concentrated in lower-paid, less secure, or less technologically intensive occupations while leadership and highly skilled positions remain disproportionately male-dominated.

7.6 The Gendered Implications of the Green Economy

The fifth objective assessed the extent to which contemporary sustainability policies and green-economy transitions recognize women's contributions. The findings suggest that the green economy presents both an opportunity and a potential source of renewed inequality.

The expansion of renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, conservation, circular-economy activities, and other environmentally oriented sectors can generate new employment opportunities. However, ILO (2018) cautions that structural barriers such as skills gaps and occupational segregation may limit women's participation. Thus, simply increasing the number of green jobs does not guarantee equitable access to them.

From an ecofeminist perspective, a genuinely transformative green economy should address both production and reproduction. If environmental policy focuses exclusively on creating new market-based green industries while ignoring unpaid care work, it risks reproducing the very inequalities that feminist scholarship seeks to challenge. A sustainable economic transition therefore needs to consider who performs care work, who benefits from green employment, who owns productive assets, and who participates in environmental decision-making.

The analysis further suggests that gender-responsive green policies should include access to education and technical training, equal employment opportunities, social protection, land and resource rights, entrepreneurship support, and leadership opportunities. These interventions should be accompanied by institutional mechanisms for preventing discrimination and occupational segregation.

The objective should not simply be to increase the numerical participation of women in green sectors. The deeper objective is to ensure that women participate in decent, secure, adequately compensated, and decision-making-oriented forms of green employment.

7.7 Intersectionality as a Necessary Extension of Ecofeminist Analysis

The sixth objective identified gaps in existing research and policy frameworks concerning women's labour and intersectional identities. The findings demonstrate that an intersectional framework is essential because gender does not operate independently of other structures of inequality.

Crenshaw (1991) conceptualizes intersectionality as a means of understanding how multiple systems of disadvantage interact. Applied to ecofeminism, this perspective prevents the category of "woman" from becoming overly generalized. Gaard (2017) argues for an ecofeminism capable of engaging with multiple dimensions of environmental and social injustice, while Salleh (2020) emphasizes the political-economic structures that shape ecological and gender relations.

This intersectional orientation is especially important for understanding the Global South. Women's relationships with land, forests, agriculture, water, and other resources are shaped by social institutions and economic conditions that cannot be adequately captured through gender alone. In the Indian context, for example, caste, class, rurality, property ownership, and access to community resources can significantly influence women's environmental experiences. The present paper's theoretical framework therefore suggests that sustainability research should avoid universalizing assumptions about women's relationship with nature.

At the same time, intersectionality should not be used solely to emphasize vulnerability. Marginalized women should also be understood as agents who possess knowledge, organize communities, participate in resource management, and contribute to environmental movements. This dual recognition of vulnerability and agency produces a more balanced ecofeminist analysis.

7.8 Policy Gaps and the Need for Gender-Responsive Sustainability

The seventh objective was to propose recommendations for gender-responsive and intersectional policies. The findings point toward several areas requiring institutional transformation.

First, unpaid care work needs greater recognition within social and economic policy. Recognition should be accompanied by measures that reduce and redistribute unpaid care responsibilities, including accessible public services, social protection, and supportive infrastructure. The ILO (2018) emphasizes the importance of addressing care work within broader decent-work and social-policy frameworks.

Second, women's rights to land and natural resources need to be strengthened. Access to resources is fundamental to meaningful participation in sustainable livelihoods and environmental governance. Without secure rights and decision-making authority, women may

remain dependent upon institutions controlled by others, limiting their capacity to influence resource-management decisions.

Third, women's participation in environmental governance needs to move from token representation toward substantive participation. This requires institutional mechanisms that provide women with real authority, information, resources, and opportunities to shape environmental decisions.

Fourth, green employment policies should incorporate gender-responsive training and skill development. Women should have opportunities to enter technical, professional, managerial, and leadership positions rather than being confined to traditionally feminized occupations.

Finally, sustainability policies should incorporate intersectional assessments. Policies should consider how gender interacts with caste, class, ethnicity, rurality, poverty, and other dimensions of social inequality. Such an approach would help ensure that environmental programs reach those who experience the greatest structural disadvantages.

7.9 Theoretical Contribution of the Study

The present review based paper and analysis contributes to ecofeminist scholarship by bringing together three dimensions that are frequently treated separately: women's labor, ecological sustainability, and gender justice. The analysis demonstrates that these dimensions are connected through systems of production, reproduction, governance, and resource distribution.

The paper also reinforces the value of moving beyond a purely symbolic understanding of women's relationship with nature. Ecofeminism should not be interpreted as suggesting that women are inherently closer to nature or naturally better environmental stewards. Rather, the significance of women's ecological engagement can be understood through their historically and socially structured roles, knowledge, labor, and experiences. This distinction is important because essentialist interpretations may unintentionally reproduce gender stereotypes.

The integration of ecofeminism with intersectionality provides a more analytically rigorous framework. It allows researchers to examine not only the relationship between women and nature but also the institutions, markets, cultural norms, and political structures that determine who bears environmental costs and who controls environmental resources.

7.10 Research Gaps and Directions for Future Research

The use of secondary sources in the present paper provides a broad conceptual and multidisciplinary perspective but also identifies limitations in the existing evidence base. The paper does not generate new primary data concerning women's lived experiences. As a result, future research should complement theoretical analysis with qualitative and quantitative empirical studies.

Particular attention should be given to comparative studies examining women's experiences across rural and urban settings, different socio-economic groups, and different ecological regions. Primary research could also investigate how women themselves understand the relationship between care work, livelihoods, environmental change, and sustainability.

Further research is also needed on women's participation in emerging green industries, particularly concerning wages, occupational mobility, leadership, technological training, and working conditions. Longitudinal studies could examine whether green transitions reduce gender inequalities or reproduce existing occupational hierarchies.

In addition, future studies should investigate how gender-responsive environmental policies operate at the local level. Such research would help bridge the gap between international policy frameworks and the everyday experiences of women and communities.

7.11 Overall Interpretation

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that sustainability cannot be understood solely as an ecological or technological challenge. It is also a question of labour, power, resource distribution, governance, and social justice. Women's paid and unpaid labor sustains households, communities, and ecological systems, yet institutional structures frequently fail to recognize its economic and environmental significance.

The ecofeminist perspective therefore offers a broader understanding of sustainable development by insisting that ecological well-being and gender justice are mutually dependent. Environmental policies that disregard women's labor risk reproducing social inequalities, while gender policies that ignore ecological conditions may fail to address the material foundations of women's lives.

The central implication of the study is consequently that a genuinely sustainable future requires transformation at the intersection of economy, ecology, and social relations. Recognizing women's labor, strengthening their rights to resources, ensuring substantive participation in governance, expanding equitable access to green employment, and incorporating intersectional perspectives are not peripheral additions to sustainability policy. They are central conditions for achieving socially just and ecologically resilient development.

8. Conclusion

This paper underscores the indispensable role of ecofeminism in bridging the gaps between environmental sustainability and gender justice. Through a critical examination of women's labor—both paid and unpaid—within ecological and economic systems, the research reveals how deeply intertwined gender inequality and environmental degradation are under patriarchal and capitalist structures. Women's contributions to sustaining both households and ecosystems remain largely undervalued, despite their centrality to sustainable development.

The analysis highlights persistent barriers that restrict women's access to natural resource management, green employment, and decision-making processes, which, if left unaddressed, risk perpetuating gender disparities even within the emerging green economy. An intersectional perspective is vital to understanding and addressing the diverse experiences of women, particularly those from marginalized communities who face compounded vulnerabilities but also possess critical ecological knowledge.

The findings call for transformative policy and institutional reforms that recognize and compensate women's reproductive and productive labor, secure their rights over natural resources, and promote inclusive governance models. Incorporating gender-responsive and intersectional approaches within sustainability initiatives is not only a matter of justice but also essential for the effectiveness and resilience of environmental policies.

Ultimately, this research affirms that sustainable growth and gender justice are mutually reinforcing goals. By embracing the ecofeminist framework, policymakers, scholars, and activists can work toward a future where ecological health and social equity are co-produced, ensuring a more just and sustainable world for all.

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