

CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION: A GENDER ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The heightened impact of the climate crisis has reached a stage that it has forced many governments to declare a state of climate emergency. In this situation, even as attempts are being made to address the different concerns related to climate change, it is important to examine critically the ideological undercurrents that keeps the earth susceptible to human exploitation. This enquiry is done taking the key of gender as a tool of analysis and it is based on the premise that oppressive gender relations among humans has a direct impact on human-nature relationships. Gendered associations between women and nature lead to the feminization of the earth and the consequent vulnerability to abuse. Scanning the deeper tangles between gender and ecology using an eco-feminist lens point to the nexus between the structures of traditional patriarchy and structures of capitalist patriarchy, leading to the persistent violence against women and the earth. Gender Justice as a key to climate justice and ecological conversion is seen as a crucial step in this context. For this to happen, feminist theologians find it imperative to overcome the hierarchical and dualistic thinking that condition human consciousness.

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Although the lockdown of land, water bodies, mountain ranges and rivers has been going on often not just for years but decades, and the changing climate, rising temperatures or melting glaciers have been crying for attention, it has never really hit human beings as much as their own lockdown due to COVID 19.

Medha Patkar¹

A little virus can help us make a quantum leap to create a planetary, ecological civilization based on harmony with nature. Or, we can continue to live in the illusion of mastery over nature and move fast forward to the next pandemic. And finally, to extinction. The Earth will continue to evolve, with or without us.

Vandana Shiva²

When the 2nd wave of the COVID 19 hit India and left many Indians dying as they gasped for breath, people across the country and in many parts of the world stood speechless, startled by the unfolding events that laid bare human helplessness in its most extreme expressions. Though every aspect of our existence has been affected by the pandemic, people dying due to preventable reasons like lack of oxygen was indeed disconcerting as it challenged the human sense of control over life. While the threats posed by the pandemic continue to linger on, this could also a grace-filled time that invites us humans to go beyond our anthropocentric approach to life and find ourselves connected with the rest of creation. The question is whether this acute sense of vulnerability induced by the pandemic awaken human consciousness to the gasping of other life forms as they puff and pant for the vital life energies necessary for their existence on this planet? The observation made by Medha Patkar when she speaks of ‘the changing climate, rising temperatures or melting glaciers crying for attention’ corresponds to this concern.

On being confronted by acute climate crisis and its impacts on biodiversity, forest management and food, many governments around the world have already begun declaring a state of emergency. Climate emergency has been defined as “a situation in which urgent action is required to reduce or halt climate change and avoid

¹Medha Patkar, “Climate vs. COVID-19: Are we Ready for the Transformation?” *Stir World*, April 17, 2020, <https://www.stirworld.com/think-opinions-climate-vs-covid-19-are-we-ready-for-the-transformation-asks-activist-medha-patkar> accessed on 20 May 2021.

² Vandana Shiva, “A Virus, Humanity, and the Earth,” <https://www.deccanherald.com/specials/sunday-spotlight/a-virus-humanity-and-the-earth-821527.html> accessed on 20 May 2021.

potentially irreversible environmental damage resulting from it," and it is termed as the final call to save the world from a 'climate catastrophe.'³ The "Special Report" published by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on oceans and the earth's frozen zones, known as the cryosphere explains this in unambiguous terms.⁴ It is noted that even as the pandemic could lead to a temporary dip in global greenhouse gas emissions, this must not distract from the urgent need for rapid fundamental changes in infrastructure, energy, land use and industrial systems to set us on a path to net zero emissions globally, latest by 2050.⁵

It is against this backdrop that I situate the call to 'ecological conversion,' which as opined by Pope John Paul II already in 2001, could make humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe to which it has been heading.⁶ In *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis underlined his conviction that "*ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion*" (LS 219). *On this note we pay heed to the call of 'Special Laudato Si' Anniversary Year' to transform the present groaning and travail into the birth pangs of a new way of living together, bonded together in love, compassion and solidarity, and a more harmonious relationship with the natural world, our common home.*⁷

A sense of deeper relationality with other forms of life in our common home becomes possible only when we humans experience a change in outlook and that will open the path to ecological conversion. In this paper, I would like to look into the intricacies of this process using the key of gender. An eco-feminist analysis using a gender lens could help us understand why the dominant humans take an exploitative approach towards nature and what corrective measures could be taken in order to bring about a mutually beneficial relationship among humans and with the earth. This could help us enter with greater mindfulness into the path of conversion or a

³Matt McGrath, "Final Call to Save the World from 'Climate Catastrophe,'" <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-45775309> accessed on 31 October 2020.

⁴See IPCC Special Report: Global Warming 1.5C on <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/> accessed on 25 October 2020.

⁵Andrew Norton, director of the International Institute for Environment and Development, (IIED) cited in "Climate change: World mustn't Forget Deeper Emergency," <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-52370221> accessed on 28 October 2020.

⁶John Paul II, General Audience, 17 January 2001, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20010117.html accessed on 20 May 2021.

⁷See "Laudato si' Anniversary Year Plan 2020-2021," <https://www.humandevlopment.va/en/news/2020/laudato-si-special-anniversary-year-plan.html> accessed on 20 May 2021.

‘turning around’ that is imperative in this critical phase of ‘climate emergency.’

The Gender Question and Ecological Concerns

Even though the term gender is generally used as a synonym for women in ordinary parlance, the association between gender and ecology becomes clear only if we look into its deeper implications in the analytical sense. Analytically gender denotes the socio-cultural definitions of man and woman and the consequent role prescriptions according to their maleness or femaleness. As per the cultural notions of gender, men are ‘masculine’ in nature and women, ‘feminine’. The qualities attributed to masculinity and femininity are valued differently and marked deeply by relations of power. The authority to hold the reins of power over resources, ideology and decision making is generally considered a masculine privilege that men enjoy whereas women are expected to find fulfilment in nurturing, caring and self-sacrificing as per the feminine roles attributed to them. While femininity is idealized in women, the so called feminine qualities also stunt their growth as persons while making them extremely vulnerable to exploitation. This vulnerability to exploitation and abuse is also the lot of the earth as it is taken to be feminine and passive in nature.

Many environmentalists have noted that climate change is not gender-neutral but has gender differentiated causes and effects.⁸ Women are indeed the ones most severely affected by climate change and natural disasters, but their vulnerability is not innate; rather it is a result of inequities produced through gendered social roles, discrimination, and poverty.⁹ The greater vulnerability of women to climate change than men, has been attested by the United Nations *Women Watch* for the following reasons: because they make up the majority of the world’s economically poor, do most of the agricultural work, bear unequal responsibility for household food security, carry a disproportionate burden for harvesting water and fuel for everyday survival, and rely on threatened natural resources for their livelihoods.¹⁰ In the poorer households, this also affects the academic

⁸See Irene Dankelman, “Climate Change: Learning from Gender Analysis and Women’s Experiences of Organizing for Sustainable Development,” *Gender and Development* 10, 2 (2002) 21–29.

⁹Gaard Greta, “Ecofeminism and Climate Change,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 49, (March–April 2015) 20–33.

¹⁰UN Women Watch, “Fact Sheet: Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change,” 2009, [https:// www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/downloads/ Women_and_Climate_Change_Factsheet.pdf](https://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/downloads/Women_and_Climate_Change_Factsheet.pdf), accessed 30 September, 2019.

performance of young girls who are often kept at home to help with household duties, this being a reality in rural India and perhaps in many countries of Asia.

Women and girls also face an even more serious risk with the onslaught of climate-induced disasters like human trafficking. Organized trafficking of women is emerging as a potentially serious risk associated with environmental problems. Climate-related disasters such as flood, drought or famine may disrupt local security safety nets, leaving women and children unaccompanied, separated or orphaned due to the erosion and breakdown of normal social controls and protections. These disasters that lead to increased physical, social and economic insecurity affect women and children more adversely as they are among some of the push factors that give rise to trafficking.¹¹

Social researchers on climate change argue that any attempt to tackle this problem that excludes a gender analysis will be insufficient, unjust and therefore unsustainable. According to them, shedding light on the gender dimensions of climate change will enable a more accurate diagnosis and a more promising 'cure' than is possible with a gender neutral approach.¹² Environmental consultant Candice Stevens suggested that the "abysmally slow" progress on sustainable development might be linked to "sluggish" advances in achieving gender equality, and called for research to investigate this question.¹³

Gendered Connections between Women and the Earth

The gendered association between women and the earth runs deep in cultures which have strong patriarchal undercurrents. This can be illustrated taking a linguistic example, language being a powerful medium that reinforce the gendered connections between woman and the earth. In my mother tongue Malayalam, I have heard the phrase *Pennayal Bhoomiyolam Kshamikkanam* often repeated, which means to say 'a woman must be patient like the earth,' patience being prescribed as an antidote to suffering. Sayings

¹¹C. Nellemann, R. Verma and L. Hislop, ed., *Women at the Frontline of Climate Change: Gender Risks and Hopes*. A Rapid Response Assessment. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP GRID-Arendal) 2011, 5–7.

¹²Sherilyn Mac Gregor, "A Stranger Silence Still: The Need for Feminist Social Research on Climate Change," on amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/25887296/session2_macgregor_2010.pdf? accessed 22 August, 2019.

¹³C. Stevens, *Are Women the Key to Sustainable Development?* Boston Univ./UN, 2010, <https://www.bu.edu/pardee/files/2010/04/UNsdkp003fsingle.pdf>, accessed on 25 September 2019.

like this are propagated to legitimize the abuse of women and the earth in the process of extracting their resources. The gendered linkages between women and nature are also brought out in the metaphor of the seed and earth—a symbol of biological reproduction and relations of production. From the ancient times, human reproduction in India has been conceived in terms of male seed germinating in the female field, which is a cleverly devised patriarchal symbolism to justify patriarchal lineage. The seed symbolizes the father's contribution and the field is the mother. This seed is contained in the semen and by equating women's body with the field or the earth, man claims ownership over her sexuality and reproductive capacities just as he is entitled to have control over the earth and the fruit of the earth. As noted by Leela Dube, while patriarchy ties down women to the 'supreme duty' of motherhood, the symbolism of the seed and the field is utilized by culture to underplay the significance of women's contribution to biological reproduction and for creating and sustaining an ideology in which strategic resources of both types, material and human remain in the hands of men.¹⁴

Eco-feminists over the last few decades have unearthed the deeper entanglements between gender and ecology. When French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne coined the term "*ecological feminism*" in 1974,¹⁵ it served to bring to surface a wide variety of "women-nature" connections. Ecofeminists have critiqued male-biased Western canonical philosophical views (assumptions, concepts, claims, distinctions, positions, theories) about women and nature and called for alternatives and solutions to such male-biased views.¹⁶ They showed how the structures of traditional patriarchy merge with structures of capitalist patriarchy to intensify violence against women and the earth,¹⁷ and argued that no solution to ecological crisis will be realized within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination.¹⁸

¹⁴Leela Dube, "Seed and Earth: The Symbolism of Biological Reproduction and Sexual Relations in Production," in Leela Dube, Leacock and Ardner, ed., *Visibility and Power: Essays on Women in Society and Development*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986, 22–53.

¹⁵Françoise d'Eaubonne, *Le Feminisme ou La Mort*, Paris: Pierre Horay, 1974.

¹⁶G. Gaard and L. Gruen, "Ecofeminism: Toward Global Justice and Planetary Health," in Zimmerman et al., *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology* (4th ed.), Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005, 155–157.

¹⁷See Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, London: Zed Books, 1993.

¹⁸Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Women/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*, New York: Seabury Press, 1975, 204.

On the structures of domination, eco-feminist discussions make important critical observations about the dualistic positioning of male vs female and culture vs nature.¹⁹ It is noted that men have appropriated all that is associated with culture in terms of knowledge production, construction of ideologies and belief systems, the creation of language and particularly in defining what religion is all about, religion being one of most powerful vehicles of culture. In the bargain, women have been identified with nature, the earth, all the more for the essentialized association of women with body and reproduction.²⁰ While culture dominated by men was meant to be active and dynamic, rational and productive, female bodies and the earth remained passive and receptive, vulnerable to exploitation by pleasure seeking and profit oriented masters of culture. Even as nature was clothed in cultural assumptions, idealized or romanticized as mother nature, endless source of nourishment and the like, nature was also considered irrational, chaotic, mindless. It was claimed that vast tracks of wilderness was to be tamed or domesticated, her resources to be plundered and exploited for human enjoyment.²¹

Ecofeminists find that seventeenth-century science could be implicated in the ecological crisis, the domination of nature, and the devaluation of women in the course of production of scientific knowledge. The historical roots of gendering of the earth are traced to the heroes of English Renaissance like Francis Bacon and William Harvey who deployed sexual politics to structure empirical method as power over nature. In the Renaissance and Scientific Revolution, nature was considered as female. Bacon advocated extracting nature's secrets from "her" bosom through science and technology. As woman's womb had symbolically yielded to the forceps, so nature's womb harbored secrets that through technology could be wrested from her grasp for use in the improvement of the human condition.²² The subjugation of nature as female was thus integral to the scientific method. One of Bacon's earliest (though posthumously published) works, *The Masculine Birth of Time* (written in 1602–1603)

¹⁹ Val Plumwood, "Ecofeminism: An Overview of Critical Positions and Arguments," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Supplement to Vol. 64, June 1986.

²⁰See in this regard, Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" in M.Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere, ed., *Woman, Culture, and Society*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974, 68–87.

²¹Mary Grey, "Ecofeminism and Christian Theology," *The Furrow* 51, 9 (Sep. 2000) 481–490.

²²Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990.

is subtitled *The Great Instauration of the Dominion of Man over the Universe*. For many ecofeminists, his words take on a chilling significance as he wrote this at the time of the great European Witch Hunt, when many defenseless women were being tortured on a huge scale in order to extract the truth behind the powers that they exercised.²³

Gender Justice as a Key to Climate Justice

At the Bali Climate Conference in 2007, a slogan that found a strong echo was 'No climate justice without gender justice.' This was emphatically stated on the grounds that gender analysis should be integral to the appraisal of public policies designed to reduce carbon emissions and other measures taken to address climate change.²⁴ An important development in feminist responses to climate change is the shift in focus from women as individuals/groups to gender as a system structuring power relations.²⁵ It is within this framework that it is argued that women hold the potential to bring about an ecological revolution ... [that] would entail new gender relations among humans and between humans and nature.²⁶

While women continue to experience acute and differential impacts given the accelerated pace of climate change and these impacts exacerbate existing inequities in socially-constructed gender roles, responsibilities, perceptions and skewed power relations that tend to disadvantage them, it is to be noted that they do not remain mere victims of climate crisis. We find women also providing vital hope for successful adaptation through their critical knowledge, experience, agency and unique role in agriculture, food security, livelihoods, income generation, management of households and natural resources in diverse eco-systems, and participation in a variety of socio-cultural, political-economic and environmental institutions.²⁷

A strong voice in this field is that of Vandana Shiva, who besides her many contributions as a celebrated writer on eco-feminist concerns, built *Navdanya* (Nine grains), India's biodiversity and

²³Grey, "Ecofeminism and Christian Theology," 481–490.

²⁴Geraldine Terry, "No Climate Justice without Gender Justice: An Overview of the Issues," *Gender and Development* 17, 1, Climate changes and climate justice (March 2009) 5–18.

²⁵Greta, "Ecofeminism and Climate Change...", 20–33.

²⁶Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, 100.

²⁷C. Nellemann, R. Verma and L. Hislop, ed., *Women at the Frontline of Climate Change*, 2011.

organic farming movement on realizing there is a convergence between objectives of conservation of biodiversity, reduction of climate change impact and alleviation of poverty. Her work gains great significance against the backdrop of increasing farmers suicides in many states of India. According to Shiva, biodiverse, local, organic systems produce more food and higher farm incomes while also reducing water use and the risks of crop failure due to climate change. We need to move from the myopic obsession with monocultures and centralization, to diversity and decentralization since these are the dual principles to build economies beyond oil and to deal with the climate vulnerability that is the residue of the age of oil.²⁸

In her classic work *Soil Not Oil*, Shiva connects the dots between industrial agriculture and climate change. Shiva shows that a world beyond dependence on fossil fuels and globalization is both possible and necessary. Condemning industrial agriculture as a recipe for ecological and economic disaster, Shiva's champion is the small, independent farm: their greater productivity, their greater potential for social justice as they put more resources into the hands of the poor, and the biodiversity that is inherent to the traditional farming practiced in small-scale agriculture. What we need most in a time of changing climates and millions hungry, she argues, is sustainable, biologically diverse farms that are more resistant to disease, drought, and flood. In her trademark style, she draws solutions to our world's most pressing problems on the head of a pin: "The solution to climate change," she observes, "and the solution to poverty are the same."²⁹

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) asserts that women's voices, responsibilities and knowledge on the environment and the challenges they face will need to be a central part of the adaptive response to a rapidly changing climate. In a Rapid Response Assessment, UNEP affirms that women's labour, power, knowledge, expertise, and organizations, their roles in stewarding food, water, fuel and natural resources for households and communities make them indispensable allies and innovators in any efforts at disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in rural areas now and

²⁸Vandana Shiva, "Diversity is the Key to Halting Climate Chaos," *The Guardian*, 7 Jun 2006 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2006/jun/07/guardiansociety> supplement, accessed on 22 September 2019.

²⁹See Vandana Shiva, *Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Crisis*, North Atlantic Books, 2015.

in the future.³⁰ It is further argued that given the political deadlock over addressing global warming, a critical mass of female voices could change the tenor of political and corporate decisions and should be used to galvanize climate policy.³¹

Besides addressing the question of women's under-representation in policy/decision making bodies that deal with climate crisis, ecofeminist critics have suggested that the dominant responses to climate change like mitigation and adaptation display a stereotypically masculine focus on supply side, technical solutions and militaristic 'muscle-flexing.'³² Issues that women traditionally organize around environmental health, habitats and livelihoods have been marginalized in debates that treat climate change as a scientific problem requiring technological and scientific solutions without substantially transforming ideologies and economies of domination, exploitation and colonialism.³³ Rather than looking merely to technical fixes it is argued that women bring into focus the social dimension in addressing environmental problems.³⁴

Ecofeminists problematize also the naming of the current geological age as the Anthropocene epoch in view of the fact that human activity has become the dominant influence on climate and the environment.³⁵ This is contested taking into consideration the increasingly unequal effects of climate change, and the political and ethical responsibilities posed by it. They ask: 'How can an epoch be named after a species that is not equally responsible for its conditions throughout history?'³⁶ The difficulty to think of a universal "Anthropos" arises because indigenous and other non-industrial, non-Western cultures, while not contributing to climate change, are at the highest risk of violence from the effects of projects that continue to aggravate environmental degradation as well as the increasingly violent social relations that accompany these projects. This issue is raised also from the perspective of LGBTQI groups and

³⁰Nellemann, Verma, and Hislop, ed., *Women at the Frontline of Climate Change*, 5, 20.

³¹Susan Buckingham, "Call in the Women," *Nature*. 468, 25 (November 2010) 502.

³²F. Denton, "Climate Change Vulnerability, Impacts and Adaptation: Why does Gender Matter?" *Gender and Development* 10, 2 (2002) 10–20, 18.

³³Greta Gaard, "Ecofeminism and Climate Change," *Women's Studies International Forum* 49 (2015) 2–42.

³⁴G. Johnsson-Latham, Report to the Environment Advisory Council, Ministry of the Environment, Sweden, 2007, 6.

³⁵P.J. Crutzen, "Geology of Mankind," in Paul J. Crutzen: *A Pioneer on Atmospheric Chemistry and Climate Change in the Anthropocene*, 2016, 211–15.

³⁶Jill S. Schneiderman, "The Anthropocene Controversy," *Anthropocene Feminism*, ed. Richard Grusin, Minneapolis: Minnesota, 2016, 169–95, 189.

so the overwhelming singular question that feminism cannot stop asking is: “*whose Anthropocene?*”³⁷

Feminist Theological Considerations on Ecological Conversion

Conversion being a multi-dimensional process that involves setting right one’s relationship with self, others, the universe and with God, feminist theology asserts that this cannot be seen in a compartmentalized manner but needs a holistic approach. Feminist theologians see the domination and exploitation of vulnerable humans inseparable from the abuse of the earth and so they argue that ecological conversion need to follow a deeper awareness of the ecological sin, which has personal and structural dimensions. For Ivone Gebara, the noted Latin American feminist theologian, the impulse to dominate and exploit the vulnerable is at the root of ecological sin. In her opinion, this system of exploitation threatens to undo the processes that maintain the lifecycle of all earth beings in relation to one another, crafted by the earth over billions of years.³⁸

Rosemary Radford Ruether, the renowned eco-feminist theologian takes the argument further in stating that,

humans are latecomers to the planet. The plants and animals existed billions of years before us. We are descendants of the long evolution of increasingly complex life forms on earth...We were not created to dominate and rule the earth, for it governed itself well and better for millions of years when we did not exist or existed as a non-dominant mammal...Immortality does not lie in the preservation of our individual consciousness as a separate substance, but in the miracle and mystery of endlessly recycled matter-energy out of which we arose and into which we return.’³⁹

As I see it, the roots of ecological sin lie in the hierarchical and dualistic thinking patterns that stain human consciousness. When hierarchy is established as a divinely ordained system of ordering relationships, domination among humans in the name of racial, class, caste, ethnic and gender identity construction and the human mastery of the earth gets religious legitimization leading to ecological sin. Theological articulations that are coloured by dualistic philosophical principles are equally problematic as they tend to deny the earth its sacredness. The basic assumption of eco-feminist

³⁷Rosi Braidotti, “Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism,” *Anthropocene Feminism*, ed. Richard Grusin, Minneapolis: Minnesota, 2017, 21–48.

³⁸Ivone Gebara, *Teología a Ritmo de Mujer*, Madrid: San Pablo, 1995, 146–156. See also, Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History*, Fortress Press 2011, Ch. 8.

³⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Ecofeminism: The Challenge to Theology,” *Deportate Ensuli Profughe*, no. 20 (2012), 28.

theology is that the dualism of soul and body must be rejected, as well as the assumptions of the priority and controlling role of male-identified mind over female-identified body. This anthropology is traced to be at the heart of the distortion in Western thought in human relationships to ourselves, as well as to our fellow earth creatures and the cosmos as a whole.⁴⁰ The mind/matter and spirit/flesh divide resulting from dualistic thinking has done incalculable damage to the flow of spirit, that is life energy between the different forms of life on this planet. Hence, the ecological crisis is increasingly seen as a spiritual crisis of huge proportions.⁴¹ Ecological conversion implies overcoming hierarchical dualism and seeing ourselves as inter-related to other forms of life, as rightly affirmed by *Laudato Si*.

Today, feminist seekers committed to spirituality and justice are unpacking the concept 'We Inter Are'. It points to our existence as mutually constituted beings with the rest of creation. We are and we become in mutuality, in the give and take from other forms of life in this universe. *Feminist historian and contemplative writer Lata Mani affirms that only on embracing the radical equality of life would we know that life in this universe is meant to be a non-hierarchical poly existence.*⁴²

Eco-feminist theologians have contributed much to a re-thinking of theology that facilitates ecological healing and liberation. As Mary Grey observes, a Christian eco-feminist theology of creation demands a radical re-thinking of all our cosmic, cultural and vital theological reference points. It implies experiencing the world as sacred, as held by sacred being or God. God is not extraneous to the world, but both transcendent/immanent, as power of life, energy, love, sustaining and energizing this web of life. God is the Mystery of relational life and being itself, God's energy sustaining the entirety of life forms.⁴³ Taking the strong mystical tradition of Christianity, instead of seeing this as an individual's visionary experience, ecofeminist theology recovers mystical experience as a community experience both of God's energy—expressed by Hildegard of Bingen as *greenness/viriditas*—and the darkness of God's pain in the suffering/dying of

⁴⁰Ruether, *Ecofeminism: A Challenge to Theology*, 28.

⁴¹Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Our Living Earth in Crisis—A Joint Call for a Spiritual Awakening*, Norway: Emmaus, 1994.

⁴²See <http://www.latamani.com/blog/2016/5/8/embracing-the-radical-equality-of-life> accessed on 9 Dec. 2020]

⁴³Mary Grey, *Sacred Longings: Ecofeminist Theology and Globalization*, London: SCM Press, 2003.

creation. The cross of Christ is re-planted ever anew in the suffering and fragility, the vulnerability of the flawed places of existence.⁴⁴

From this theology of creation follows the ecofeminist spirituality that takes God as the immanent source of life and the renewal of life that sustains the whole planetary and cosmic community. God is neither male nor anthropomorphic. God is the font from which the variety of particular beings 'co-arise' in each generation, the matrix that sustains their life-giving interdependency with each other, and also the judging and renewing insurgency of life that enable us to overcome the distortions that threaten healthy relations.⁴⁵

Feminist Liberation Theology has been offering a powerful new naming of God as the passion for Justice, as *the power that works for justice and makes it*.⁴⁶ Liberation theology expresses faith in this God who hears the cry and the anguish of the poor. But in times of ecological crisis, it is observed that we have to widen the categories of poverty, for *nature is now the new poor*. The compassionate, liberating ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, must be understood as inclusive of the suffering of birds and animals, of land turned to desert and streams polluted—and focused on the anguish of poor people sustaining life in these conditions.⁴⁷

Redefining care theologically beyond gendered prescriptions is a significant element of ecological conversion. *Laudato Si'* reminds us of the urgency of 'caring for our common home.' Caring has been conventionally gendered as women's task as girls and women have been socialized to be expert care-givers in the family and the Church. Women have been professionally assigned the title of 'home makers' for their role as care-givers in the family. Women's role as care-takers of the environment got symbolized in the imagery of women from northern India hugging the trees to prevent their felling, what became global later, as the Chipko movement—Chipko in Hindi means "to embrace" or "hug". Today more than ever, there is an urgency to care for the earth, our common home and in this task it is imperative that all human persons—women, men and all people irrespective of their gender or sexual orientation become 'home makers' and care-givers like God who is the greatest care-giver of life.

⁴⁴Grey, *Sacred Longings*.

⁴⁵Ruether, "Ecofeminism: A Challenge to Theology," 30.

⁴⁶See Carter Heyward, *Our Passion for Justice*, New York: Pilgrim, 1984.

⁴⁷Sally McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

Moving beyond the domesticated gender norms of care giving, care has to inform every aspect of public life be it in the sphere of politics, economy, religion and the like, so that decisions affecting life of humans and the earth are taken 'care-fully', causing no harm to anyone or anything. This ethics of care will help forge new forms of affective and life-sustaining relations with the nonhuman world. It is within this framework that we speak of care economy so that development becomes sustainable. This would help us to move beyond anthropocentrism and discover our ecological selves, that is nurtured by environmental resources and in inter-dependent relationality with them. Since very many people are still fixated in gendered moulds and related roles, gender and environmental education need to inform ecological Christian praxis at every level of formation of children and adults, starting with the pulpit, catechesis, basic Christian/human communities and other spaces of Christian formation and education.

Conclusion

When a state of emergency is declared on any aspect in life, it is not a time to wait but to act in a determined manner so that what is damaging can be set right without compromising delays. Climate emergency being a situation that has thrown life out of gear for humans and other creatures on this planet, it calls for critical responses with a sense of urgency.

'Ecological conversion' as observed by William Ng is about creating a global community that both cares for one another and the planet.⁴⁸ In these critical times when climate crisis continues to be a matter of very grave concern, the challenge before us humans is to evolve transformative strategies going beyond gendered approaches in ideology and praxis. It is time then that we humans evolve in a holistic manner that the integrity of human life and that of creation is upheld in a non-compromising way.

⁴⁸ William Ng OFM, "Ecological Conversion: Greening the Christian Heart," UCANews<https://www.ucanews.com/news/ecological-conversion-greening-the-christian-heart/84207> accessed on 18 September 2020.