

# Conceptualizing Ecological Feminism in Indian Context: An Interaction between Women and Environment in Various Communities

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**Abstract---** Women are an integral part of our Indian Culture and History. They have had the onus of being a creator and a preserver of our culture in different societies, religions, tribes, environment etc. Apart from taking care of their families they have also taken the responsibility to take care of Mother Nature. Does this link Environment and Women?

Women are believed to have faced the oppression and domination of the other gender, the concept of feminism tries to understand this and focuses on building equality amongst genders. Likewise, with the rate at which our ecology and environment is degrading and climate change is occurring around us, the Environment has also observed similar subjugation and cruelty from the patriarchal society. Eco-Feminism tries to understand the symbolism between women and environment. This paper tries to explain the concept of Eco-Feminism and its roots in Indian Culture with the help of different tribes across cities such as Odisha, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, and North-East Cities etc. Incidents and Excerpts are taken from these tribes to understand the role of women in protection of its environment through various indigenous practices.

**Keywords---** Diversity, Ecology, Environment, Gender, Women

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The term eco-feminism has originated within the premise that during patriarchal practices "ladies" and "nature" were regarded as subordinate courting to men. Each of these are subservient to the patterns, attitudes and institutions of male domination and control. but given women's association with nature, women have a unique responsibility to the health and survival of nature itself and to the care of planet additionally. Eco-feminist philosopher Karen Warren explains it as "the logic of domination" and therefore women and nature must be allies in the struggles to resist (2014).[5] Eco-feminists associate feminist spirituality with "cultural feminism" insisting on reclaiming the relationship whether or not spiritual or biological or social as a supply of strength and birthday celebration (Longenecker, 1997). This is also considered a sign of women's sensitivity to and capacity to care and love the nature. While for some researchers and scholars, the association with the nature is rather symbolic which is equally powerful source of the protection of the environment. This renewed effort has been also termed as tainted with essentialism, which is dangerous

to women. The relationship of women with nature replicates the patriarchal views. As Catherine Roach [11] argues that "it is ecologically unsound to argue that either women or men are 'closer to' or 'farther from nature' (1991).[3] Rather, what is important here to note is that women have always been in the front to pursue environmentalism and towards the global efforts to establish a sustainable human relationship with the biosphere. There is a gap in the existing literature specifically on Indian Eco-feminism which overlooks the traditional age-old practices of some of Indian community women who by community ethos are closer to the nature. Their ways of living are such that they benefit the local atmosphere in a huge way. The current literature merely addresses the efforts made by female environment activists associated with international NGOs. This is the reason that the environment sensitive community women never get recognition at the forefront even when they have been active environment protection activists in the villages. The organic nature of relationship these villages' women with environment and wild life animals is not bound by intuitional or any other modern ways of dealing with the issue of environment protection. Their moral ethos is such

that they live in a harmonious relationship with nature. This two-way linkage has made it able to sustain the natural atmosphere in its organic form uncontaminated by the human pursuits.

## II. RESEARCH QUESTION

To what extent women from different environment sensitive communities in India are able to influence the path of Environment Protection? A study of women environment activists, who have been overlooked in the mainstream academic literature on Environment protection activism in India.

## III. HYPOTHESIS

In comparison with Institutional mechanism, women in the village are sensitive to nature, wild-life.

## IV. METHOD TO DO THIS STUDY

The method for this research paper is content analysis of the available literature on the subject matter. The main approach is to do a discourse analysis while critically engaging with the concepts related to the research question. The concept of Eco-feminism is critically analyzed in this paper while giving an alternative worldview towards the cause of environment protection. To do this, the community specific practices are being reviewed in this paper. The techniques used for gathering and interpreting the issue include the review of important media reports on the issues and its qualitative analysis. The overall method of this paper is an iterative process wherein the presentation of arguments if back and forth between the available conceptual literature on Eco-Feminism and practical field evidences of such practices in various media reports and journal articles. This will help in building a literature bridge between the conceptual and practical aspect of this research issue. The process of evaluating different practice of the communities in India will help in comprehending their relevance for the larger environment related efforts on international level. Their recognition by the media too, signals the significant role they can play if intertwined with the policy making processes.

## V. STRUCTURED DISCUSSION

### **Indigenous Women and Nature: A Link**

The relationship of the land connects the individual with their ancestral roots. It is the relation of responsibility which connects women with the land. This factor of responsibility towards the environmental entities ensures that they remain available, healthy and worthwhile for the future generations. These range from the keepers or teachers of community based their ecological knowledge, understanding, action and love to protect and preserve the land and environment. Such

as Anishinaabe women have a responsibility towards water resources.

In the above context, Brittany Luby conducted a study in 2015 titled, "From Milk-Medicine to Public Re-education Programs: An Examination of Anishinabek Mothers: Responses to Hydroelectric Flooding in the Treaty District, 1900-1975" (2015). She examined as to how hydroelectric development which occurred along the Winnipeg River jeopardized Anishinabek women's access to local resources which were essential for maternal work. The traditional food sources for these people such as whitefish were contaminated and the women risked poisoning the infants with Methyl Mercury<sup>1</sup>. With this contamination, the whitefish were no longer a safe or viable food source. This is the example as to how the environmental degradation influences the interrelationship between land, body and culture. It is different across different communities and cultures.

Adding to this, one more study was conducted in 2016 by Anna Bunce, James Ford, Sherilee Harper, Victoria Edge titled "Vulnerability and Adaptive capacity of Inuit women to climate change: a case study from Iqaluit, Nunavut". They look at the inter-relationship between climate change and the ability of Inuit women to practice traditional cultural activities. The activities such as, "berry picking, sewing and time spent on land"<sup>2</sup> get affected by the effects of climate change. The participants in the above study noted that these activities play a role in mental health and wellbeing of the people as well as in maintaining a strong sense of cultural identity. The ability of the indigenous women and girls to carry out the traditional roles and activities contributes in good mental health, well-being and strong sense of cultural identity. Adding to this, the scholars have also argued that to determine the required actions for promoting indigenous women's role in biodiversity, the traditional knowledge on conservation and sustainable use need to be valued and prioritized. The capacity building programs for the Indigenous women can take place through education, employment, skilled trades and entrepreneurship opportunities. A targeted training should take place for indigenous women to become leaders in the matters related to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity such as conservation, technologies, research and development, reporting and dissemination of information, development of

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<sup>1</sup> Luby, Brittany. (2015). From Milk-Medicine To Public (Re)Education Programs: An Examination Of Anishinabek Mothers' Responses To Hydroelectric Flooding In The Treaty #3 District, 1900–1975. *CBMH/BCHM*, 32(2), 364

<sup>2</sup> Bunce, A., Ford, J., Harper, S., & Edge, V. (2016). Vulnerability and adaptive capacity of Inuit women to climate change: a case study from Iqaluit, Nunavut. *Natural Hazards*, 83(3), 1427

action plans, participation in the leadership councils, mobilization of network building, budgeting, financial skills.

One of the important things to be noted is that Indigenous knowledge is misunderstood and marginalized in the current assessment as well as protection processes. The lacks of trust and confidentiality have been identified as the barriers in sharing the indigenous knowledge. It must be collected through culturally respectful protocols including earning the trust, building relationship with the knowledge holders and enabling them to maintain ownership of their knowledge.

The indigenous women are mostly left out of the decision-making process related to environment protection. Therefore, it is pertinent to link the expert's views with the grassroots knowledge in order to achieve the holistic solutions. Still, it is important that indigenous women are given the opportunity to share their knowledge on their own terms. The existing gap between the traditional knowledge of local communities and the policy makers' expertise needs to be filled. For this, the governments and organizations must identify as well as build bridging mechanisms between indigenous women grassroots movements and national-international policy groups which can simultaneously incorporate the local women's perspectives.

### **Eco-feminism and Ecological Feminism**

According to Eco-Feminist theory, the green politics entails an egalitarian, collaborative society where not one group dominates. (Carolyn, Merchant 2005)[1]. There are a variety of branches of the concept of eco-feminism with different approaches such as liberal eco-feminism, spiritual-cultural ecofeminism, and social-socialist ecofeminism including materialist ecofeminism. The application of these eco-feminism thoughts towards the social thought is pursued through art, social-justice, political-philosophy, religion, poetry.

According to Carol "The Eco-feminist analysis explores the connections between women and nature in culture, religion, literature, iconography, and addresses the parallels between the oppression of nature and women" (2007). She draws the parallel as seeing women and nature as property, and men as curators of culture. Here, Eco-Feminism emphasizes that both women and nature must be respected. In the same line of thought, Charlene Spretnak[2] has categorized eco-feminist work: 1) Through the study of political theory as well as history

- 2) Through the belief and study of nature-based religions
- 3) Through Environmentalism

Within this categorization, scholars such as Rosemary Ruether, [12]Carolyn Merchant,[9] Gaard and Gruen have given four sides to the framework:

1. The scientific revolution resulted into the mechanical materialist model of the universe and reduced everything to mere a source to be optimized into the fullest.
2. The dominance of patriarchal religions with the existence of gender hierarchies has ignored the divinity aspect al-together.
3. The dualism of self and other is entailed into it with power and domination binary.
4. The Capitalist model has an intrinsic need for the exploitation, destruction, and instrumentalization of animals, earth and people for the sole purpose of wealth creation.

The authors argue that these four factors have brought a "separation between nature and culture" which is the root cause of planetary ills. The starting of the Eco-Feminist movement was when the women played an active role in the activisms. Sociologist Susan A. Mann[7] noted that "the beginning of eco-feminism is when women of different race and class backgrounds made connections among gender, race, class and environmental issues" (2011).

Mirna, Zurzulovic explains that "Ecofeminism opposes the dominant paradigm in green theorizing and rejects the reformist environmentalism" (2000). The dominant paradigm says that environmental problems are solved by the externalization of the costs onto developing countries, thereby presenting the Western model of development and knowledge as the only acceptable model for mankind in modernity. As opposed to this Mirna says that "Eco-feminism is part and parcel of radical ecology, addressing the possibilities for changing the hegemonic patriarchal paradigm whereby nature and women are conflated and delegitimized as inferior, passive, and non-productive categories, by means of domination and exploitation" (2000).

It is within this above paradigm of Eco-Feminism that this project traces the role of Indian women in protecting the environment. The leading role is played by the Tribal women across Indian states that are closest to the nature because of their ancient old lifestyles and values. The different sections of this literature review entail the discussion on the role played by women in environment conservation.

## **VI. MAIN FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

### **Women and Environment in India**

#### **Odisha**

In a UNFCCC report on climate action, the role of tribal women of Odisha has been highlighted. In the Kandhmal district of Odisha where deforestation is an issue, tribal Kandha women are taking many initiatives. In one such

initiative, the sustainable agricultural method is implemented by mainstreaming minor millet-based agriculture into the tribal farming system in scarcely irrigated areas. This initiative aims to reach 500 tribal women farmers.<sup>3</sup> This activity aims to empower the tribal women to have access and control over the natural resources and find avenues to use it in effective manner. This would pave the way for improving the quality of their own lives while ensuring the food security within household and protect the environment for the future generations.

The report gives the detailed analysis of the benefits of millet farming. This is an eco-friendly farming system having the potential to solve global food crisis. The employment creation for the tribal women through this system is the main goal. The farming takes care of the various dimensions of food and livelihood security, sustainable farming practice ensuring the increased crop diversity.

Further, this initiative has also helped to bring women together at the community level while simultaneously provide them the training on climate change issue and ways to address them. These tribal women farmers are also practicing sustainable agricultural methods to create an atmosphere in the villages to promote the use of self-prepared organic manure. It is done by using the unused upland and barren land to increase the income and protect the surrounding forests from deforestation. The activity is to be scaled in the future to other forest areas by using a consortium approach. Here the participation of women is ensured to address the restraints related to the climate change issues.

The state of Odisha came into limelight when the news came that a young tribal woman got appointed in a UN youth advisory group. This group aims at providing resolution in order to combat the climate crisis. The name of this tribe is Khadia who have been fighting for the forest and land rights of Adivasis in Odisha's Sundargarh district for generations. It came in news that "Archana Soreng belonging from the same tribe is currently associated with Vasundhara, which is an action research and policy advocacy organization focusing on natural resource governance, conservation and sustainable livelihoods"<sup>4</sup>. It has also come to limelight through news articles that "she has been documenting the forest protection practices of her tribe, women's role in the movement, and safeguarding the

Adivasis rights"<sup>5</sup>. In one of her interviews, she argued that "in the smallest of the things it becomes visible that the way men and women perceive forests are very different"<sup>6</sup>. Some of the examples are the way a tribal woman plucks a mahua flower, they patrol the forests of Nayagarh district through the night, and these women treat the forests like their children and ensure forest protection by putting their labor into this cause.

Archana Soreng and her family use siali leaves to make plates for the consumption and sale purposes also. These plates are consumed even after one usage by the livestock or else they are composted. From this better waste management techniques can be learned. Thus, she provides three important things to be recognized: firstly, it should be recognized and identified that tribal women can offer solutions to the climate change. Second, it helps in confirming active and meaningful participation of indigenous people in the climate action discourse and simultaneously providing them with the opportunities to share their perspectives and stories. And lastly, it is about bringing together the traditional conservation knowledge with the indigenous community practices in the city lifestyles.

Similarly, it came in the news that "a group of 3500 women from 127 tribal villages in Kandhamal, Sambalpur, Angul, and Deogarh entered into an agreement with Leaf democracy, a German company[4] to supply one lakh siali plates every month"<sup>7</sup>. There is very high demand of these plates in European countries because these plates act as a biodegradable alternate to the plastic and Styrofoam. The minor forest products such as siali leaves, sal seed, Mohua flowers and tamarind are also sold by the tribal women of the areas mentioned above.

Basudev Mohapatra has written about the tribal women of the Sundargarh district of Eastern India's Odisha state in a report. He has stated that these women contribute in producing safe and nutritious food. Through the organic farming method, they assist in achieving food security and better livelihood for their people. He suggests that "this knowledge needs to be up-scaled to tackle the effects of climate change through sustainable approach"<sup>8</sup>. In addition to this, India comprises around 700 Scheduled Tribes (ST) who have a vast repository of traditional knowledge on account of their distinctive culture and living system (GoI,

<sup>3</sup> See the link to read more <https://unfccc.int/climate-action/momentum-for-change/activity-database/tribal-women-farmers-as-change-agents-for-environmental-protection-india>

<sup>4</sup> : See the link for more details: <https://www.ethicoindia.com/tribal-activist-archana-soreng-is-indias-new-hope-for-a-greener-world/>

<sup>5</sup> See the link for more details: <https://www.ethicoindia.com/tribal-activist-archana-soreng-is-indias-new-hope-for-a-greener-world/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ethicoindia.com/tribal-activist-archana-soreng-is-indias-new-hope-for-a-greener-world/>

<sup>7</sup> See the link: <https://yourstory.com/2017/11/tribal-entrepreneurship-india>

<sup>8</sup> See the link to read more <https://www.lifegate.com/tribal-women-organic-agriculture-india>



2018; World Bank et al., 2010). In India many states have such examples of varying traditional knowledge. The studies have found that traditional knowledge of the Adi, Monpa, and Khasi tribes of north-east India have more than 200 practices related to agriculture, food and biodiversity conservation (Singh, 2010). Further, crop-diversification practices and mixed farming have helped indigenous communities of Panji valley in Himachal Pradesh to combat the effects of climate change (Meena 2019).

### Rajasthan

The Bishnoi community is present widely over the north-west state of India and the belief and values of this community has been known for and has assimilated the natural co-existence among all the species. The community has always believed and has inherited the fact that the protection of its environment, wild life and plants is their sacred tradition. Narender Bishnoi from Delhi remarks that “the community’s practices are in line with contemporary global demand that urges people to respect environment and all the life forms”.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, all other communities need to emulate the idealism and practices of this community related to the preservation of ecology.

The scholars have noted that the landscape of Rajasthan encourages the dependence on agriculture and livestock rearing practices. In addition to this, the natural vegetation of the region helps in sustaining superior breeds of cattle for the export to agricultural zones of other regions. The pre-modern polity of this region has extensively been nature friendly. The rulers used to pose fines of different kinds for making the illegal usage of natural resources. “There used to be penalty on the felling of green trees or defacing the village ponds through the use of dyes. Although it is not clear which officials imposed or collected the fines but the enforcement was evidently commonplace” (Kumar 2005:138). Further, the upkeep of green areas in the arid regions of the state has been ensured by the community norms on the maintenance of sacred grooves, or orans. (Khanwalkar).[6]

The Census (2011) has shown that the people from Bishnoi community majorly own land in huge amount and have been pursuing work as pastoralists while simultaneously also pursuing work such as farming, selling milk, and working with the forest departments, police, transport with the bureaucrats, leaders and teachers etc. The

eco-friendly ethos if the community has contributed in ensuring the environmental frugality. it's been suggested that they have got a passion for letting trees, shrubs, and foliage to develop within the fields to guard the wilderness sand from wind erosion as well as offering the forage for livestock in the course of the recent dry season or a famine (Bishnoi, Shivraj 2017). Adding to this, Devi explains that people of Bishnoi community even though belong to Jodhpur prohibit the use of blue color to curb and reduce the overuse of Indigo which leads to cutting huge amounts of green shrubs (2012). It is believed that the blue color absorbs the harmful rays of the sun. Bishnois also are inspired by means of early environmental carefulness towards all residing beings. therefore, other than protecting animals, in addition they shield the Khejri tree. along with Deb notes that “the tough environmental situations have made them understand that Khejri tree isn't always handiest their source of supplementary meals but additionally ample fodder for his or her livestock” (2012).

Maheshwari in her documentation of this community calls them a Hindu sect formed in areas of Jhanganloo, Pipasar and Mukam in erstwhile Mewar/Marwar region. In contrast, Khan (2003) argues that “the Bishnoi traditions and rituals actually reflect a Muslim state of being (during the origin and founding of the sect) as they not only remain away from idol worship but also bury and not cremate their dead”.<sup>10</sup> However, Jain shows that Bishnois vehemently oppose any Islamic identity (2010). He suggests that “the ‘Hinduisation’ of the sect can be understood in the context of the parallel processes taking place with several other communities possessing liminal/transitory identities of conversions, origins as well as categorizations” (Jain 2010 and 2011). The Bishnoi community was one such social formation which can be seen in the syncretized religious and social features of the Bishnoia. Turner has termed it “as reflective of ‘social’ liminality” (1967). The Bishnoi sect found a new identity in their ecology inspired religion due to evolving in a different period of Indian history.

Living in the thar dessert, the Bishnois have a well-functioning traditional water harvesting system along with the production of millet, wheat, carrots, radishes, sesame oil, wild fruits and vegetables (Botanist Saraswati Bishnoi, 2012). The scholars have noted that “Bishnois considered that their guru was a reincarnate of Vishnu”.<sup>11</sup> It has also been stated that “the origin myths about Jambhoji and the development of the Bishnoi community emerges directly from their relationship with the land” (Reichert 2015:53).

<sup>9</sup> Dr. Narender Kumar Bishnoi is an Assistant Professor in Law center-1, Faculty of Law at the University of Delhi, India. You can contact him at n.bishnoi84@gmail. <https://www.uri.org/uri-story/20170605-bishnoi-not-just-community-belief-system-supports-environmental-commitment>

<sup>10</sup> See the link for more details <https://www.sahapedia.org/bishnois-of-wes>

<sup>11</sup> See the link for more details <https://www.sahapedia.org/bishnois-of-wes>

The compilation called “Jamasaagar entails the religious philosophy of the sect which was written in the form of poetic literature (it elaborates rules and advices for a just, humane, non-violent, truthful, simple as well as vegetarian lifestyle)”<sup>12</sup>. In this way Bishnois formed a distinct religious sect.

Some scholars have also argued that after becoming disenchanted by the power struggle between Hindus and Muslims, Guru Jambheshwar sought out the ways to reconcile them. As Lal also noted that “Guru Jambheshwar had put before them an example of a heightened moral sensibility, while some others suggest that a long period of drought moved him to seek protection for all animals and plants” (2005). The community negated none of the two religions, and learnt as well as borrowed from contemporary Hindu and Muslim cultures. This is how they formulated an innovative concept of humaneness.

Jambheshwar founded the Bishnoi Sampradaya[13] (asect) in Sambharthal. As per reports, “it is located on a sand dune called Samrathal Dhora in a town called Nokha near Bikaner in western Rajasthan”.<sup>13</sup> The twenty-nine life principles were mandatory to follow. These include no killing or eating of animals, no cutting down of ‘living’ trees or their ‘living’ parts and no alcohol consumption for Bishnoi community.

“The eight principles were prescribed to preserve biodiversity as well as encourage animal husbandry, out of the 29 principles laid down by Jambhoji...the non-sterilization of the bulls, prohibition on killing of animals and birds and not cutting the green trees are also some of the principles...along with this, some principles also deal with personal hygiene and health with tenets like vegetarianism, safe drinking water, daily bathing, and environmental sanitation, prohibiting the use of tobacco, opium and alcohol....seven other principles give directions for healthy social behavior directing the followers to live a simple truthful life, be content, be abstentious, avoid false arguments and not criticize others”.

The people who agreed to abide by these rules cutting across the castes and creed were welcome to join the sect. The Shabads of the community continue to draw supporters and followers even after the death of Jambhoji in 1532 (Chandla 1998; Dalal 2014; Tobias 1988). Further, it is documented that “the Bishnoi community trace their descent from eight endogamous sections namely Jats, Baniya, Brahmin, Ahir, Sonar, Chauhan, Kasibi and Seth”.<sup>14</sup> All of these castes represent a mix of ‘high’ and ‘low’ social divisions of the society.

The social concern for the environment in medieval Rajasthan manifested itself in various forms. The economy of this region is mainly sustained by animal husbandry therefore the cattle slaughter is prohibited by the community. The respect and spirit of sharing for all the living creatures along with frugality with the use of natural resources have also been included in these principles. The cow dung is used for cooking rather than burning fuel (Wildfilms, India 2012). Dreams has explained that “there is the practice of storing rain water, build granaries to preserve excess grains, filter water to avoid harming the microorganism and their modes and strategies of conservation are truly inspirational besides being timely” (2011). It truly shows their dedication towards the cause of environment conservation.

Adding to this, the Bishnois have attachment to their normal practices with reference to environment, conservation and spiritual ceremonies such as the everyday Havan (a ritual burning of services together with grains and ghee that's held to mark births, marriages and other devotional unique occasions) nonetheless continue with native enthusiasm (Singh 1998:188-191). “The Bishnois use coconut husk and not wood for the daily havan pooja” (Temple Priest Khejrli, 2018). “Tracing the history of the community, it is found that in the year 1730 AD the king of Jodhpur sent his army out to cut trees to build his palace” (Vardhan, 2014). [14]The scholars have observed that “the massacre and martyrdom in Khejarli is read as the willingness of the Bishnois to sacrifice life for the sake of protecting nature” (Lal 2003; Fisher 1997; Gadgil 1999; Sankhala and Jackson 1985). It continues to color the narratives of Bishnois and foster ecological memories of the Khejarli massacre, its innovative protest which entailed tree-hugging also considered the ‘first-Chipko’ movement and an inspiration for the one organized later in 1972.

The Dhams in Bishnoi community are reflective of the sect’s organizational principles and religious philosophies. These are the metaphor and symbol of the conservation practices of the community. It has been documented that “the stories and anecdotes along with natural relics are associated with the religious sites having the imagery and allegories of the Bishnoi life world”.<sup>15</sup> some of the conservation practices have been noted such as “the plantations of trees, their revitalization, maintenance of sacred groves, creation of ponds, judicious use of water, setting aside feeding areas and shelters for birds, animals alike”.<sup>16</sup>

Reichert[10] explains that “the Bishnois believe animals to be born along with the human beings on the earth

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.sahapedia.org/bishnois-of-wes>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.sahapedia.org/bishnois-of-wes>

<sup>14</sup> See the link <https://www.sahapedia.org/bishnois-of-wes>

<sup>15</sup> See the link <https://www.sahapedia.org/bishnois-of-wes>

<sup>16</sup> See the link <https://www.sahapedia.org/bishnois-of-wes>

therefore animals also have the right to share their food and water along with the human beings” (2015: 77). According to Sumati Mehrishi, women in Bishnoi community are at the core of the unfaltering ecological movement since Amrita Devi Bishnoi who had laid down her life for protecting Khejri trees in Khejarli village<sup>17</sup>. Presently, the women like Barju Devi Bishnoi are at the forefront of protecting and preserving trees, animal life, natural resources and environment in the strongly knit Bishnoi samaj.

In the present times of connectivity and awareness, Bishnoi girls from younger generations are very much aware of the media narratives regarding the belief system of their community. These girls aspire to become successful administrators in Rajasthan. Hence, the state deserves to get environment-conscious women officers. The Government highly recognizes the Bishnoi work to save the local environment and there is also a government award, the Amrita Devi award honoring those who sacrificed their lives for other living beings (Mehrotra, 2009)[8].

Adding to this, it was gathered from the field work in Jodhpur district of Rajasthan that Bishnoi community women are becoming active participants in the local environment related initiatives. Such as it was found that they work in close connection with the administrative bodies set up for the protection of wild life animals. These women save injured black bucks and put them in the local animal protection center. They take care of these wild life animals considering them the family members.

Other than this, women hugely participate in the local spiritual events of the community held by the temples. They contribute the home-made ghee for havan and other elements to be put in the havan. Such spiritual events are organized frequently for the cleansing of local atmosphere. These gathering are held during the auspicious weather transition months for the wellbeing of all the people, animals and environment.

### **Kerala**

Kudumbashree, Kerala’s program and network for women’s empowerment and poverty removal has been collaborating with tribal women. The Panchakrishi program focuses on the sustainable agriculture and preservation of bicultural diversity. It aims to make the farmers self-sufficient and also improve their market access. It covers over 192 hamlets and 840 hectares of land under the panchakrishi farming, pulses production, tubers, paddy, millets and also vegetables. A woman Shakeela, trains the small farmers to use the traditional agro-biodiversity

knowledge and sustainable farming. She has overseen the conservation of over thousand species of crops, trees, wild plants in the Wayanad<sup>18</sup>.

Overall, the researches done in this field show that women farmers are at the forefront of agro-biodiversity knowledge and conservation. In the small landholdings they manage livestock and have more specialized knowledge of wild plants for food, fodder and medicine.

### **North-East**

The women of North-East are very actively engaged in the Environmental protection with more than 20 women’s organization actively working. The Eastern India Women’s Association is one of the most vigorous groups located in Shillong, Meghalaya (Agarwala, 2006). The ethnic tribes such as Khasi, Jaintia and Garo are matrilineal groups.

In one of the tribes, Khasi, women are at the center. The Khasis have a deep-rooted affinity with nature. The folktales are mostly woven around the various forces of nature such as the hills, vales, rocks, caves, flora and fauna. The women are actively involved in agriculture, hunting, fishing, gathering huge range of forest foods, materials, making daily use articles, from houses to ploughs, baskets to leaf-plates. They also possess the ancient wisdom of herbal medicine and knowledge about the many aspects of nature and human life. The practice of shifting cultivation known as (Thang Shyrti) is the traditional way of agricultural operation. Women take the lead in these methods. The Khasi women also collect the wild grown broom grass and sell it locally as well as abroad.

## **VII. OUTCOME OF THIS STUDY**

The above study shows that women of indigenous communities in India are not only environment sensitive but they are also very visionary and effective in implementing their practices for so many years on a collective level. As we see that, sometimes it becomes difficult for the policy makers to implement the simplest of the policy decisions due non-cooperation from the society. But indigenous communities based on their close personal bonding and interdependent nature of existence; easily persuade the masses to follow on the footsteps of the community leaders for the cause of environment protection. This way of persuasion is very effective in terms of making a consensus on larger issues. One other outcome of this study is that the intertwining of the environment cause with the religious philosophy has taken place only in India in the entire world. And by no means has this intertwining caused any sort of harm to the people following it. Even it has become a firm

<sup>17</sup> Mehrishi, Sumati. 2018. Ardent Environmentalists: How Women Of A Jodhpur Village Propel The Bishnoi Sentiment For Ecology And Life.

<sup>18</sup> See the link to read more <https://www.lifegate.com/tribal-women-organic-agriculture-india>

ground for the prosperity of their communities as well as their natural habitat. It is only because of this intertwining that, nature sensitivity has ingrained in the psyche of the people for so many centuries. The religious historical background of their environment activism is certainly a model to be followed by the world leaders to implement it across the world.

### VIII. STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The main strength of this research paper is its main findings which are not yet covered by the exiting literature. The available concepts and theories in the area of environment preservation and protection ignores the environment-society embeddedness which has clearly come out in this paper. The existing studies merely focus upon the institutional aspect of environment activism completely ignoring its societal rootedness. Although many activists have tried to engage with the communities through their NGOs but that in consequence has given power to these organizations. In contrary to this, this paper has highlighted the initiatives wherein the communities are at the center and their age-old historical ethos foreground the decision making. This has helped in addressing the research questions and hypothesis of this paper.

The limitation of this paper is the lack of data derived from interviews and field research. The reason for this is that this paper is written at the initial stage of the research project. It can be considered a pilot study for a future in depth ethnographic and field-based research on the same topic. Because of this limitation the complete information on the communities' practice has not been inculcated in this study. The impact of this is that the media-based evidences are not cross checked with the field realities. They are analyzed on their own authenticity. The portion of this paper covering the discussion on the difference between Eco-Feminism and Ecological Feminism fall short on many grounds. The limitations of the existing paradigms in the field of environment protection become visible in this paper as well. These paradigms were originated mainly in response to the industrialization and development of the west. In contrast, the Indigenous community' efforts are not in animosity or challenge to any such paradigm. They are mainly rooted in ancient traditional ways of living.

### IX. OFFER PRESCRIPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE WORK

The paper prescribed in-depth field-based research of the communities in this paper. The interview with the community leaders can offer articulate and valuable solutions to the problems of the environment protection. The state-society embeddedness is the main requirement for

effective implementation of the environment protection policies. And the persuasion methods can certainly be learned from the women of Indigenous communities in different part of the country.

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