

# **Eco-feminism and Grass-root Involvement: Exploring the Connection with Women and Surroundings**

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to theoretically explore the relationship between Ecofeminism and its grassroots level by studying and showing how women in the rural areas of Maharashtra are working at the grassroots level to bring about changes in nature and their own lives. The story of Maharashtra Grassroot feminists Chitralkha Kavle, Anjum Shaikh, and Maan Jalnaika of Satara district, Ramkunwar Kharat, Anita Khandagle and Kanta Shinde are good examples of how to create our existence and how we can change the perception of our society. This article analyses their ideological, and cultural origins, placing special emphasis on them showing the wisdom of women's identity and their rights as well as dispelling the illusion that uneducated women are lazy and do not want to change society at large in the case of women at the grassroots level. The study underscores the importance of recognizing, nurturing, and strengthening women's work at the grassroots level in the rural area of sustainable environmental initiatives. It advocates for a more inclusive and equitable approach to environmental decision-making and policy formulation, ultimately contributing to a more harmonious relationship between human societies and the natural world.

**Keywords:** Ecofeminism, Grassroot level, Environment, Ecology, Surrounding, Conservation, ditches, dicks

### **Introduction:**

The concept of ecofeminism includes the two concepts of ecology and feminism. Ecology means the study of the environment and feminism means the study of equal rights for men and women. In ecofeminism, both concepts of ecology and feminism are studied together. Ecology and feminism have similarities because nature and women have the power to nurture the lives. The old and rotten ideas of the patriarchal society are responsible for the dominance of ecology. Therefore, instead of studying them separately, they started studying them together. Ecofeminism appeared in the 1970s and 1980s as countless forms of feminist and environmental theories and activism intersected. The term was introduced by Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Feminism ou la Mort (Feminism or Death)* published in 1974<sup>1</sup>. Principles of Ecofeminism are constructed around nature being the central consideration for conservation and defence, requiring efficient use of natural resources, and asking for the consideration of nurturing and community growth and development as important priorities and indicators of success. Ecofeminism spread globally when women came out to protest the Three Mile Island Partial Nuclear Power Plant in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, United States, In March 1979. According to Ynestra King: "Ecofeminism is about the connection and wholeness of theory and practice the devastation of the earth and her beings by the corporate warriors, and the threat of nuclear annihilation by the military warriors as feminist concerns.

"Ecofeminism is the theory and practice of examining and challenging the political, social, historical, epistemological, and conceptual relations between the control of women and the exploitation of nature"<sup>2</sup>. Every movement that has taken place in ecofeminism has its roots in small actions that start at the local level. Not only ecofeminism but the contribution of local movements is important in every field of government, social education, and health.

Assumptions of the Research article

- 1) The selected female activists are from Maharashtra region.
- 2) The selected female activists are not the urban activists but incidental activists.
- 3) Incidents may make/change large difference in female's life.
- 4) Only the need and needful can make the difference
- 5) The articles are written in Marathi language and published in a renowned Marathi News paper's supplement "Chaturang" of Loksatta .
- 6) The renowned Marathi journalist Dr Sujata Khandaker ( art.2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>) and Pallavi Palav( art.1<sup>st</sup>) The 5<sup>th</sup> one by Shishir Savant are wrote about these women.

- 7) Rohini Kadam and Suryakant Kamble assisted both the journalists to accomplish these articles.

### **Objectives**

- 1) To study the power of grassroot leadership
- 2) To study the uneducated/literate but powerful women who have brought a great change in own life and the community.
- 3) To unveil the indomitable spirit in common women.
- 4) To spread the identity/name of common women on global realm.

### **Nature of Ecofeminism**

The connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature are highlighted to understand "why the environment is a feminist issue", as well as "why feminist issues can be addressed in terms of environmental concerns"<sup>3</sup>. Similarities between ecofeminism and ecosystem ecology can be considered through the hierarchy theory. These similarities suggest that ecofeminism and ecosystem inform and support one another. The notion of patriarchal and oppressive conceptual framework is as central to ecofeminism and ecofeminist ethics as the notion of hierarchy theory in ecosystem ecology: one could not generate any complete and impartial conclusions of each without them. Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies discussed that, "environmental concerns have not been issues for theoretical debate within the Indian women's movement"<sup>4</sup>. The women's movement in India has to a large extent been preoccupied with issues of urban-based women. It would become more broad-based if the category "women" was not treated as a homogeneous category and environmental issues relating to women of different regions, classes, and castes were taken up, without considering political and economics issues. Eco-feminism would remain limited and partial, to see if the issue of environment has led to any kind of debate within the women's movement. The attempt is to show how the women's movement would become broader if environmental and development issues concerning women of different castes and classes were taken up. Using soil and water conservation with biological measures is one of the most important practices for conserving soil and water structures, and biodiversity, and increasing agricultural land productivity through soil conservation measures (grasslands, erosion ditches, dikes, hedges, and terraces). Women have a special relationship with nature as ecofeminists argue, which is proved wrong when one analyses the various protest movements. Women's interaction with nature and their responses to environmental degradation must be analyzed and located within the material reality of gender, caste, class, and race-based division of labour, property, and

power. Women are victims of environmental degradation as well as active agents in the regeneration and protection of the environment.

## **Eco-feminism In India**

Indian culture is nature-loving. India is rich in natural resources. This natural wealth needs to be protected, and for this women are always ahead. Indian women have shown this through their actions. Indian women have worked to awaken society towards nature through their writings and have proved this by actively participating in various movements for the protection of nature. Vandana Shiva, Arundhati Roy, Mahasweta Devi, Kiran Desai, Medha Patkar, and Bina Agarwal are mainly mentioned in this.

Bishnoi is considered India's first environmentalist-born nature lover. The Bishnoi movement originated in Marwar in Rajasthan in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It was founded by Guru Jambheshwar. Who is known as Jamboji? He laid down principles that no harm should be done to plants and animals. In 1730, when Abhay Singh, the king of Jodhpur ordered the trees to be cut down, Amrita Devi stood up against the order and fought for their survival by clinging to the trees despite the prohibitions of the order. "This movement was the first in the history of the environmental movement to adopt the technique of hugging and hugging to protect trees"<sup>5</sup>. Because of this, the Bishnoi movement is the driving force behind all the movements in the history of the country. Chandi Prasad Bhatt led the first Chipko movement in April 1973 near Mandal village in Alaknanda valley. He took the villagers with him hugged the trees and protested against the felling of trees. Also in 1974, under the leadership of Gaura Devi of Reni village, there was a protest against the felling of trees and in this, Sundarlal Bahuguna also went on a fast to protest the forest policy. In 1978, Chipco activist Dhoom Singh Negi went on a hunger strike against the forest auction in Advani forest in Tehri Garhwal district. The local women tied sacred threads around the trees. Women participated in this Chipko movement to a large extent. In this research article, we have reviewed the local-level women's movement in Maharashtra.

## **Case study 1**

The selected first article on grass root feminism by Pallavi Palav is entitled, "When Do Become Amrit Kavle's Daughter Madam". This article was published on 25<sup>th</sup> of March 2023, Saturday. This chapter depicts the minute and gradual changes in women's life. So this is a subtle delineation of how a woman is castrated from her childhood until her death. Chitralekha Kavle alias Sushma Mohurle was a girl who fostered unlimited dreams for education, eloquence, dancing, leadership, anchoring and mike were her favorite deeds. But her father

prohibited her to do all these things. By nature she was introvert, submissive, patient, tolerant and throw away all her dreams. She was also treated by her husband as her father did.

Her life was changed due to the offering of 'Grass root Leadership Fellowship' by "Akshya Seva Sanstha". Through this leadership she started her first task, regained the lands that were grabbed. She studied Rojgar Hami Yojana regulations. Her dedication for work and promising nature made her Sarpanch. Later on her larger sphere of work made her president of 17 Grampanchyat. Tendu leaves gave more profit to workers. She was also opposed by some established in her village. She was so rigid and firm on her thoughts and deeds that she never looked back in her life. Her buried dreams were tempting her again She completed her graduation in Arts faculty through open University. She performed 'lavni' in front of 500 people's mob. In brief she relived her life. Her two daughters and mother in law supported her for her work. She runs successfully the saving groups, forest rights, employee organization, women's right in wealth and different government schemes for the workers and needy. She trains males and females without gender bias for the said things in different 50 villages. Her parental villagers were very astonished as they heard about her fame and popularity in the common people in her region. Her father also tells about his daughter very proudly that she is his daughter.

## **Case Study II**

The second article was published on 8th of March 2023 Saturday. In Indian society women and water have extra ordinary relationship. Because women are considered the best player and planner for house holds. They have to look water storage in the home ( though from rural or urban area ).The second story published by Sujata Khandekar is "paani paltay, tyala chalwaych"/ The Water Runs: That has to drive. This is a story of very ordinary village women who daily strives to meet the ends of their life. These women ( Asmita Tupe, Baby Mohite, Swati Dadas, Kalpana Sutar, Manisha Singade, Surekha Kalel, Vijaya Bhosle, Megha Dombbe, , Padma Mohite and Nanda Jagdale). These women fought against the daily problem, hecticness and helplessness to get the water and it's minute use. The problem was on the peak. The children bunk their schools , young women suffered miscarriage and other physical problems. Due to scantiness of water, no grain, no harvesting, no work for hands. If any tanker supplied the water it was wasted due to quarrels among women and it was going on as if it will never stop. These are the women from different cast, class, creed and religion. Water exigency brought them together. Those women determined to know the science of water under the ground. They studied 'hydrogeology'. The women studied in details their village in context to

natural resources, human resources and other related resources. After completing training They studied why, where, how and when the water is absorbed by the rocks. The women group learnt how to measure the water level under the earth. They made a survey and rejuvenate the old water reservoirs in their villages. The above water leader/ jalnaayika did all the reservoirs near about 2 to 3 years. The training was given them by Advanced Centre for Water Resources, Development and Management, Pune (Maharashtra, India). Due to their organized work they got 1 billion 44 lakh and 80 thousand rupees fund from government scheme among 6 villages. The water leader organized different water gatherings, conversation on water preservation. People united and understood the need of water. They walked out early in the morning for this expedition of water search and water drive. They set up their own village money bank( gram Kosh). Government officers helped them and guided for it. The changes which occurred due to this work are very important and notable. People changed their behavioral pattern and involved actively and positively. The benefits are as follows:

- 1) People who completely disconnected their internal relations with neighbors from 20 and more years they spoke each other . Quarreling stopped.
- 2) The untouchables were not allowed to enter in the temple but the continuous meeting in temple automatically opened the doors for untouchables and communal harmony was established.
- 3) Man women conversation ( except spouses) was considered sin but now all women could put their opinion in front of the village.
- 4) Every home created orchid.
- 5) 82,000 mulberry plants were planted that served some jobs to the villagers.

Other works like rashaan cards, education/schooling, health were focused. Megha Dombe ( one of the water leader) understood the power of Grampanchyat and her panel won by 8 out of 9 candidates.

Sujata Khandakar says that, “they got a confirm aim and all the women worked on it organized. They broke one frame of helplessness and shyness and broke many frames and inhaled the fresh and energetic sky of their abilities.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Case study: III**

The third article in this research paper was published on 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2023, Saturday. Anjum is a common citizen living in Baingawadi, Govindi of Bombay. The roots of her being a uncommon woman are seen in her sensitive and reactive nature. The two incidents make it clear . Her youngest sister who was illiterate, was always criticized and mortified by everyone as a illiterate. Anjum decided not to be humiliated by anyone in her life. So she started

schooling. But unfortunately without being matriculate she was married to a twice older than her. She experienced a lot of distortion in him as such drinking and beating. She could not bear this treatment. During her delivery time she came to know about 'stri Kendra sangathan' (women centre organisation). Through this organization she came to know 'rights in development process, The constitution, gender attitude, and gender differences etc. She realized to do something concrete in her life, for the life. As she reached her husband's home she was deadly beaten by him and was defenestrated. This was the moment where her education made her conscious and provoked her to think between the actual living and the educational motif. She was ignited by the educational weapon and throw away her husband out of the home. This was the heralding incident for her to be a bold and fearless woman in her life. She refused to wear the 'purdha/pardha', a sign of puritanism. It was shocking for her Muslim neighbours, relatives and friends. She suffered a lot in her personal life. People were unaware about her wretched condition. She concentrated herself on the surrounding problems and continuously focused on it. She confronted that women were not avail of safety toilets. Anjum participated in the 'Right to pee' movement', one of the agendas of "stri Kendra sangathan" organization. The motif of this movement was to avail the clean, safety and free of cost public toilets for the poor and needy women. She involved in this movement and gradually became an important part of this movement. She encompassed this movement by handling different complaisant deeds as such eradication of non violence, fundamental facilities by helping them to get reshan cards and adhar cards. In pandemic COVID 19 she helped them to get the government grains, to deliver the medicine ceaselessly and without much self care. Today she created her grassroot leadership by providing 501 safety, clean and free of cost public toilets among 9 lakhs population. Due to her work many Muslim women joined in her work by her inspiration. She has completely changed the face of her lane and area. Women come and gather around her, shares the working hands, gossip till midnight on different problems and solutions, participate in different activities and wear clothes which they seek suitable and comfortable. Considering Anjum's notable work The CII ( The Confederation of Indian Industries) a national level institute in India selected her for the national "Outstanding Women Leadership Award 2020" The perspective of the criticizers was changed about her by this notable award and she was recognized as a dominant lady, intellectually and morally. The journalist Sujata states about her work style that, " for the positive change in society what we need is sensitivity, affection and coexistence. And if our aim and deeds are pure oppositions will also be lessened." <sup>7</sup> One has to prove by hardwork like Anjum Shaikh.

Case Study IV

The fourth article entitled, “Reward of Sisterhood” by Dr Sujata Khandekar is published on 4 Nov 2023 in Chaturang suppliment of Loksattaa daily Marathi News paper. In this article she wrote about how two women Ramkunwar Kharat and Anita Khandagle took the grassroot feminism leadership to promote the attitude of sisterhood among the helpless girls who grew up by cherishing beautiful dreams in their eyesight for their future life.

The opening of the article is done by the description of a higher teenager girl of 18 (a married, at the age of 13). She was victimized of child marriage. The grace of her child marriage awareness in her goes to her schooling days, the programs of gender equality they had organized various times. She participated in a central program of Campaign Against Child Labour held in Delhi. She sensitized her awareness towards life and responsibilities and fixed her certain aim. She says that, “Fir the development of girls inequality, health and mental emotions these subjects should have to be studied.”<sup>8</sup> There are many more girls and boys who are working against different problems of teenagers like violence, gender inequality, child marriage, child labour, child education disparity. A number of girls and boys have raised a wall of their akin bond for the protection of their rights and freedom. These boys and girls are from the villages of Beed district in Maharashtra state. It becomes interesting and keen to know how they have sensitized themselves in such issues? How they are changing their surroundings? The inspiration for these teenagers are two ladies named Ramkunwar Kharat and Anita Khandagle from Beed and Dharashiv (Usmaanabad) district of Maharashtra state. Both of them were married in childhood. They experienced the toriness of child marriage and determined to stop the children from being destroyed by childhood marriages and child labour. Both are graduated and their education helped them to take the children away from these things. Ramkunwar has two daughters and says about them, “they are dashing. They may learn how much they want, I will allow them what they want to do.”<sup>9</sup> The attitude of Ramkunwar behind this statement is that she feel no child should be bother by the human made adverse that have faced by her. She is aggressive to solve the girls problem of education, child marriage, cyber or sexual harresment.

Anita Khandagle mainly deal with child marriage and child labour and the active participation of women in politics is her special favourite subject. According to Anita, “ the subject of child marriage is very sensitive and diplomatic as is adhered to many social, economical, political and familial complex aspects. For her, child marriage is the matter of esteem, honour, customs, laying off the burden of a daughter, economical scarcity and to be found in the shekel of rigid law. So the activists must understand the complications, political relations and responsibilities in these works.”<sup>10</sup> The working style of Anita on child marriage

is considered very important to stop the chain of social problems. Dr Sujata Khandekar says, “her working on child marriage is very important as many girls are saved from being married before the time. On any cost we destroy the lives of our daughters. We do not understand what it cast the spell on us of such duty?”<sup>11</sup> She stopped 13 child marriages in last 2 years from different castes and communities in her district. Dr Sujata Khandekar have said that, “ The echoes are last long of a stopped child marriage than the incident of stopped child marriage.”<sup>12</sup> As a grassroot observer I have also seen some stopped child marriages and completed child marriages. The last long echoes are nothing for the parents other than a defeat, a stigma on them in their community and society. There is also a dark side that why child marriage take place? Different family issues like single parenting, poorness, budding womanhood of a girl child, social insecurity, under estimation. So the child marriages took place in villages.

Ramkunwar and Anita’s father worked as a 4<sup>th</sup> class employee but their thinking was very high. They gave moral and self-esteem lessons to their daughters. Every parent should be like them, then only leaderships would born. They graduated their daughters. From last 8years both Ramkunwar and Anita are working as a continuous source of encouragement for a number of girls and boys in their region. Their work is without any bias like cast and community. Because of them many other leaderships are being shaped and intervoened in the chain of grassroot feminism. This is very important that Ramkunwar and Anita have developed their sisterhood attitude and started to reward it to the coming generations.

#### Case Study V

The selected 5<sup>th</sup> article entitled, “ Self Consciousness Linked to Livelihood” is written by Shishir Savant and published in Chaturang suppliment of Loksattaa Daily Marathi News paper on 25 Feb 2023. In this article he illustrated how the women have to face while earning for her family being a single and especially when she think about the income source out of the set pattern, as well as how she gets name and fame while working for other single women. She is caught up by all way in the compressed psyche of society. She is kept in the cage of suspection and her physical feebleness. She is suspected always for her capabilities. All these criterions were used for Kanta Shinde, a single womanhood willing to do the livelihood out of the threshold for herself. She also hails from a village of Tuljapur taluka of Dharashiv ( formerly known as Usmaanabad) . Single Woman Organization gave a twist to Kanta Shinde’s life. She is a forsaken lady by her husband. She tried to reunite with him but all her attempts were failed. She left her husband and lived with her single daughter. She completed her graduation from open University with her father’s help. In 2015 she came in contact of Single

Woman Organization and became it's member. She could hear her sorrows and agony in this organization and linked herself with others. She says, " here( in Single Woman Organization) I was developing here as a human being, understanding ownself. I I identified leadership in myself. My hopes increased, was being hopeful for life." <sup>13</sup> The togetherness of organization developed her psyche and shaped her personality internally and externally. About the experience of organization she tells, "In organization everything was strange and new. Women's rights were being known. It was identified that no one can treat us as a truffle. Conversations were taking place about rights, equality and conversation." <sup>14</sup> All these discussions led them towards to be concrete and firm in their thinking, to be straight and independent economically, independent for self image and attitude. These women found a way of self pride and other women of organization accepted the way under her leadership. Kanta Shinde always thought out of the set framework of contemporary. She twisted the set pattern of women's earning and started to work on petrol pump. The owner of petrol pump do not respond Kanta Shinde at the starting. Her , " never to give -up" <sup>15</sup> formula worked and she joined the petrol pump. In 2019 on the occasion of International Women's Day 5 women were offered the job of petrol server. These women were bullied by their near ones. Political pressure was used against them, labour contractor threatened them. But the Single Women Organization and Kanta stood firm for these women and continued their work. Now in Dharashiv district 25 women are working on petrol pump. In another districts of Marathwaada region many women are seen working on petrol pumps. Due to this work these women became confident and understood the working style, how to handle the million rupees and transaction, confidence to live the life, to tackle the men and their nature, how to face the men without hesitation along with employment. Automatically the lady drivers became carefree to go on the petrol pump and feel the fuel.

During COVID 19 many employees lost their jobs. In 2020 Kanta Shinde put the thought of Women Credit Bank. 1632 women are members of this Credit Bank and it's total balance is 85 million. This bank is strong financial supporter for the single women organization by the single women. The president of this Credit Bank is Kanta Shinde herself. She is also thinking about to go ahead step by step. She thought about to start the lady rikshaw drivers. Now more than 15 lady rikshaw drivers are working as legal drivers. The inspiration of these single women is that the women who are not single they have also joined the single women group.

## Conclusion:

Ecofeminism and grassroots involvement exploring the connection with women and the environment. It indicates that women are the power of nature. According to our views, the story of Maharashtrian ecofeminist Chitralkha Kavle, Anjum Shaikh, Maan's Jalnaika Ramkunwar Kharat, Anita Khandagle and Kanta Shinde are good examples of how to create our existence and how we can change the perception of our society. This is a shining example for this new generation of women who can save nature and society. Many people think that only large-scale efforts can bring about change in society and the environment but these fighting women have shown that change is possible even in small actions each one needs to be taken step by step for this. You should have decision-making ability, hard work, courage, honesty, and most important sense of responsibility. The story of Chitralkha Kavle, and Anjum Shaikh shows that society will break your thoughts and create hurdles in your progress but you should not stop but keep going. Jalnaika of Maan in Satara district shows that no place can be monopolized by men only but women can also create their presence in every place and make every concept of the impossible a reality. Anita Khandagle and Ramkunwar Kharat tells us how we must start to protect our society from being destroyed and it's our prime duty to control the bad spreading around us. Even Kanta Shinde's efforts teach us to see beyond horizon. Do not think what people will think and say about you. Your honest working will compel them to think positively about your work.

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