

ECOFEMINISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

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Abstract

Ecofeminism provides an interdisciplinary framework for examining the interconnected exploitation of women, marginalized communities, and nature in contemporary literature. This study analyses how literary works represent climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, displacement, indigenous knowledge, and women's ecological resistance while linking these themes with environmental justice and the Sustainable Development Goals. Contemporary narratives portray nature as an active presence and women as caregivers, knowledge holders, activists, and leaders of community resilience. The urgency of this perspective is supported by evidence: climate change could push up to 158 million additional women and girls into poverty by 2050, while about one in four people still lacks safely managed drinking water. The study finds that ecofeminist literature advances SDG 5, SDG 6, SDG 10, SDG 12, SDG 13, and SDG 15 by promoting equality, sustainable consumption, climate action, and biodiversity protection. Literature therefore strengthens ecological awareness, ethical responsibility, and inclusive approaches to sustainable development.

Keywords: Ecofeminism; Environmental justice; Contemporary literature; Gender equality; Sustainable development goals

1. Introduction

Ecofeminism has emerged as one of the most influential interdisciplinary approaches in contemporary literary studies, environmental humanities, and gender discourse by exploring the interconnected relationship between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women. The theory is founded on the belief that the same patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial systems

that dominate women also exploit the natural environment through unsustainable development, industrialization, resource extraction, and ecological destruction. Since the term "ecofeminism" was first introduced by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974, the concept has expanded into a global intellectual movement that combines feminist philosophy, environmental ethics, social justice, political ecology, and literary

criticism. Contemporary literature has become an important platform for expressing ecofeminist concerns by portraying the experiences of marginalized communities, environmental degradation, climate injustice, and gender inequality while simultaneously advocating sustainable coexistence between humans and nature (Gaard, 2017; Warren, 2020).

The twenty-first century has witnessed unprecedented environmental challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, water scarcity, pollution, and increasing natural disasters, all of which disproportionately affect women and marginalized populations. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023), global temperatures have already increased by approximately 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels, contributing to more frequent heatwaves, floods, droughts, and ecosystem degradation worldwide. Similarly, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2024) estimates that nearly one million species are currently threatened with extinction, while global biodiversity continues to decline due to unsustainable land use, pollution, and climate change. These environmental crises are not merely ecological problems but also issues of social inequality because

vulnerable communities, especially women, indigenous peoples, and economically disadvantaged populations, often bear the greatest environmental burdens despite contributing the least to ecological degradation. Contemporary literary works increasingly reflect these realities by examining how environmental destruction intersects with gender discrimination, poverty, colonialism, and social injustice.

Environmental justice has become a central concern within ecofeminist scholarship because it emphasizes the fair distribution of environmental benefits and burdens across different social groups regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. The environmental justice movement originated in response to unequal exposure of marginalized communities to pollution, hazardous waste, industrial contamination, and environmental risks. Ecofeminism extends this perspective by arguing that environmental exploitation and gender oppression are interconnected manifestations of hierarchical systems of domination. Women, particularly those in developing countries, frequently experience greater vulnerability to climate change because they are often responsible for securing water, food, fuel, and family health, making them more directly dependent on natural

resources. According to UN Women (2024), women constitute approximately 80% of people displaced by climate-related disasters, highlighting the gendered dimensions of environmental vulnerability. Consequently, contemporary literature increasingly portrays women not only as victims of ecological crises but also as leaders, activists, and protectors of environmental sustainability.

The relationship between literature and environmental consciousness has become increasingly significant in recent decades as literary texts serve as powerful tools for raising awareness about ecological crises and inspiring social transformation. Environmental literature moves beyond aesthetic appreciation of nature by critically examining the political, economic, cultural, and ethical dimensions of environmental degradation. Contemporary novelists, poets, dramatists, and essayists employ literary narratives to expose the consequences of deforestation, industrial pollution, species extinction, environmental displacement, climate migration, and ecological injustice. Through symbolism, metaphor, narrative structure, and character development, literary works encourage readers to reconsider humanity's relationship with nature and promote environmentally

responsible attitudes. Ecofeminist literary criticism therefore analyzes how representations of women and nature reinforce or challenge dominant power structures while proposing more equitable and sustainable models of coexistence.

One of the defining characteristics of contemporary ecofeminist literature is its emphasis on the interconnectedness of ecological sustainability and gender equality. Authors such as Margaret Atwood, Barbara Kingsolver, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Linda Hogan, Alice Walker, and Nnedi Okorafor have produced influential literary works that address climate change, biodiversity conservation, indigenous knowledge systems, environmental exploitation, and women's resistance against ecological injustice. These writers portray environmental degradation not simply as a scientific issue but as a deeply human crisis involving social inequality, political conflict, cultural identity, and ethical responsibility. Their narratives often demonstrate that protecting ecosystems requires simultaneously addressing gender discrimination, economic inequality, and colonial exploitation. Such literary perspectives align closely with the principles of sustainable development by emphasizing

social inclusion, environmental stewardship, and intergenerational responsibility.

The growing relevance of ecofeminism is also closely associated with the global commitment to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Ecofeminist principles directly support SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) by advocating equitable access to natural resources, environmental protection, and inclusive governance. According to the United Nations (2024), despite significant progress, women continue to experience disproportionate impacts of environmental degradation and climate-related disasters, making gender-responsive climate policies increasingly essential. Contemporary literary studies therefore contribute to sustainable development by fostering environmental awareness, promoting ethical responsibility, and encouraging critical reflection on the social dimensions of ecological crises.

2. Review of Literature

The concept of ecofeminism has evolved considerably since its emergence in the 1970s, becoming one of the most influential interdisciplinary frameworks for understanding the interconnected

relationships among gender, ecology, environmental ethics, and social justice. The growing body of ecofeminist scholarship argues that the domination of women and the exploitation of nature originate from similar patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial structures that prioritize power, profit, and control over ecological sustainability and social equality. Contemporary literary studies have increasingly adopted ecofeminist perspectives to examine how literature reflects environmental degradation, climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecological injustice while simultaneously addressing issues of gender discrimination, indigenous rights, and sustainable development. The following review summarizes major scholarly contributions that have shaped the theoretical and literary foundations of ecofeminism and environmental justice.

D'Eaubonne (1974) first introduced the term "ecofeminism", arguing that environmental destruction and women's oppression arise from patriarchal systems that promote domination over both nature and women. She emphasized that sustainable development cannot be achieved without gender equality and ecological responsibility. Her pioneering work laid the philosophical foundation for ecofeminist

thought by linking feminism with environmental conservation and advocating social transformation through ecological awareness.

Merchant (1980) significantly expanded ecofeminist philosophy in *The Death of Nature*, demonstrating how the Scientific Revolution and industrial capitalism transformed nature from a living organism into a resource for economic exploitation. Merchant argued that mechanistic worldviews legitimized both environmental degradation and the subordination of women by portraying nature as passive and controllable. Her historical analysis remains one of the most influential contributions to ecofeminist environmental history and literary criticism.

Shiva (1988) examined the relationship between environmental degradation, globalization, and women's traditional ecological knowledge in developing countries. Through her analysis of Indian agriculture, biodiversity conservation, and rural livelihoods, Shiva argued that women play a critical role in protecting natural resources because of their close relationship with land, forests, water, and agriculture. She emphasized that indigenous knowledge systems provide sustainable alternatives to

industrial development models that contribute to ecological destruction.

Plumwood (1993) critically examined the dualistic thinking embedded within Western philosophy that separates culture from nature, reason from emotion, and men from women. She argued that these hierarchical dualisms legitimize environmental exploitation and social inequality by positioning nature and women as inferior. Plumwood proposed an ecological ethics based on mutual respect, interdependence, and environmental responsibility, significantly influencing contemporary ecofeminist literary theory.

Gaard (1997) broadened ecofeminist scholarship by integrating gender, environmental justice, animal ethics, and social diversity into literary criticism. She argued that ecofeminism should move beyond essentialist interpretations of women's relationship with nature and instead examine multiple forms of social oppression, including race, class, sexuality, and colonialism. Her work contributed to the development of intersectional ecofeminism, which remains highly influential in contemporary literary studies.

Buell (2005) emphasized that environmental literature plays an essential role in shaping ecological consciousness by encouraging

readers to reconsider humanity's relationship with the natural world. He argued that literary narratives provide powerful mechanisms for understanding climate change, biodiversity conservation, environmental ethics, and sustainable development. Buell highlighted literature as an important medium for environmental education and public awareness.

Nixon (2011) introduced the concept of "slow violence," referring to gradual and often invisible forms of environmental destruction such as pollution, deforestation, climate change, toxic waste, and biodiversity loss. He argued that marginalized communities, indigenous populations, and economically disadvantaged groups experience disproportionate environmental burdens that are frequently overlooked in mainstream political discourse. Nixon's framework has become central to environmental justice studies and contemporary literary criticism.

Alaimo (2016) developed the concept of trans-corporeality, emphasizing the interconnected relationships between human bodies and ecological systems. She argued that environmental pollution, climate change, and toxic substances directly affect human health, particularly among vulnerable populations. Her work challenged

anthropocentric approaches to environmental studies by highlighting the inseparability of human and ecological well-being.

Gaard (2017) further developed critical ecofeminism, emphasizing that environmental degradation cannot be understood independently of gender inequality, racial discrimination, economic injustice, and colonial histories. She argued that contemporary ecofeminism should integrate environmental justice, climate change, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable development within a broader interdisciplinary framework. Her work has significantly influenced recent literary analyses of climate fiction and ecological narratives.

Heise (2016) examined the globalization of environmental literature and argued that ecological crises increasingly transcend national boundaries. She highlighted the importance of global literary narratives in addressing climate migration, environmental displacement, biodiversity loss, and transnational ecological governance. Her research demonstrated that contemporary literature provides valuable insights into global environmental challenges while promoting international environmental cooperation.

Rigby (2018) emphasized that contemporary literature contributes significantly to ecological resilience by encouraging emotional engagement with environmental crises. She argued that literary narratives foster empathy, ethical responsibility, and environmental awareness by illustrating the social consequences of climate change, ecological degradation, and environmental injustice. According to Rigby, literature serves as an important cultural resource for promoting sustainable societies.

IPCC (2023) reported that human-induced climate change has intensified global warming, increasing the frequency and severity of floods, droughts, heatwaves, and biodiversity loss worldwide. The report highlighted that vulnerable communities, particularly women and indigenous populations, are disproportionately affected by climate-related disasters because of existing social and economic inequalities. These findings reinforce ecofeminist arguments regarding the unequal distribution of environmental risks and the need for gender-responsive climate policies.

UNEP (2024) emphasized that global biodiversity continues to decline at an alarming rate, with approximately one million species threatened with extinction due to habitat destruction, pollution,

overexploitation, and climate change. The report stressed that biodiversity conservation requires inclusive environmental governance, sustainable resource management, and recognition of indigenous ecological knowledge, all of which are consistent with ecofeminist principles advocating social and environmental justice. UN Women (2024) highlighted the gendered dimensions of climate change by reporting that women remain disproportionately vulnerable to climate-induced poverty, displacement, food insecurity, and resource scarcity. The report argued that increasing women's participation in environmental governance, climate adaptation, and sustainable development policies is essential for achieving long-term ecological resilience and social equality. These findings provide empirical support for contemporary ecofeminist literary analyses that portray women as both victims and leaders in environmental movements.

World Meteorological Organization (2024) reported that 2023 was the warmest year ever recorded, accompanied by record-breaking ocean temperatures, glacier retreat, rising sea levels, and extreme weather events across multiple continents. The report emphasized that accelerating climate change poses significant threats to biodiversity, food

security, public health, and economic development. Contemporary climate fiction increasingly incorporates these scientific realities into literary narratives, strengthening the relationship between literature, environmental justice, and ecological awareness.

3. Theoretical Framework of Ecofeminism

The theoretical framework of ecofeminism provides the philosophical and analytical foundation for understanding the interconnected relationship between environmental degradation, gender inequality, and social justice. Ecofeminist theory argues that the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women originate from similar patriarchal, capitalist, colonial, and anthropocentric systems that prioritize domination, profit, and control over ecological sustainability and human equality. Contemporary literary studies employ ecofeminist theory to analyze how literary texts represent women, nature, environmental conflicts, climate change, indigenous knowledge, and ecological resistance. The following theoretical dimensions constitute the core framework of ecofeminism.

Patriarchal Theory and Domination of Nature: Patriarchal

theory forms the central foundation of ecofeminism by arguing that societies structured around male dominance have historically treated both women and nature as objects to be controlled, exploited, and subordinated. Ecofeminists maintain that the same ideology responsible for gender discrimination also legitimizes deforestation, pollution, overconsumption, and environmental degradation. Contemporary literary works frequently portray patriarchal systems as contributing simultaneously to ecological destruction and women's marginalization. Therefore, ecofeminism seeks to replace domination with cooperation, equality, and ecological harmony.

 **Feminist Environmental Ethics:** Ecofeminism extends feminist ethics into environmental philosophy by emphasizing care, empathy, cooperation, and responsibility toward both human beings and the natural world. Unlike traditional environmental ethics that often focus solely on conservation, ecofeminist ethics recognize that ecological sustainability cannot be achieved

without social justice and gender equality. Literary narratives frequently illustrate women as protectors of forests, rivers, biodiversity, and local ecosystems, emphasizing ethical relationships rather than exploitative interactions with nature.

 **Social Ecology Perspective:** Social ecology argues that environmental crises originate primarily from unjust social, political, and economic systems rather than from technological development alone. Ecofeminism incorporates this perspective by explaining that ecological degradation is closely connected with inequality, poverty, discrimination, and unequal access to natural resources. Contemporary literature often demonstrates that marginalized communities experience the greatest environmental burdens while contributing the least to ecological damage.

 **Intersectionality Theory:** Modern ecofeminism increasingly incorporates intersectionality to examine how gender, race, ethnicity, class, caste, disability, and colonial

history interact with environmental injustice. Environmental problems do not affect all people equally; women, indigenous communities, and economically disadvantaged populations often experience greater exposure to pollution, climate disasters, and resource scarcity. Contemporary literary works highlight these overlapping forms of inequality, illustrating that environmental justice requires inclusive social policies and equal access to natural resources.

 **Environmental Justice Theory:** Environmental justice emphasizes the fair distribution of environmental benefits and environmental risks among all members of society regardless of gender, race, or economic status. Ecofeminism adopts this framework by arguing that women and marginalized communities frequently bear disproportionate environmental burdens due to unequal political and economic structures. Literary narratives addressing pollution, mining, industrialization, deforestation, and climate migration often reveal the unequal social

impacts of environmental degradation.

 **Deep Ecology:** Deep ecology recognizes that all living organisms possess intrinsic value independent of their economic usefulness to human beings. Ecofeminists appreciate deep ecology's emphasis on biodiversity conservation while also arguing that environmental protection should include human rights, gender equality, and social justice. Contemporary literature frequently portrays humans as integral components of ecological systems rather than as dominant rulers over nature.

 **Indigenous Ecological Knowledge:** Ecofeminism recognizes indigenous ecological knowledge as an essential source of sustainable environmental management. Indigenous communities often maintain harmonious relationships with forests, rivers, wildlife, and biodiversity through traditional conservation practices developed over centuries. Contemporary literary works increasingly celebrate indigenous women as custodians of ecological wisdom who resist

environmental destruction and promote sustainable resource management.

 **Ecofeminist Literary Criticism:** Ecofeminist literary criticism examines how literary texts represent relationships between women and nature while challenging patriarchal narratives that justify domination over both. Scholars analyze symbolism, characterization, metaphors, landscapes, environmental conflicts, and ecological narratives to understand how literature promotes environmental ethics and gender equality. Contemporary novels, poetry, and short stories increasingly portray ecological crises as inseparable from social injustice.

 **Sustainable Development Perspective:** Modern ecofeminism aligns closely with sustainable development by advocating balanced relationships among economic growth, environmental conservation, and social equity. Ecofeminist theory supports several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 6 (Clean Water and

Sanitation), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). Literature inspired by ecofeminism encourages responsible consumption, environmental stewardship, and inclusive governance.

Climate Justice Framework:

Climate justice extends environmental justice by emphasizing that climate change disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, especially women, indigenous communities, children, and low-income households. Ecofeminism highlights that these groups often contribute least to greenhouse gas emissions while experiencing the greatest climate-related hardships. Contemporary climate fiction increasingly explores themes of displacement, food insecurity, biodiversity loss, and community resilience from an ecofeminist perspective.

Table 3.1 Major Theoretical Foundations of Ecofeminism

Theory	Main Focus	Contribution to Ecofeminism

Patriarchal Theory	Male domination and hierarchy	Explains the common roots of gender oppression and environmental exploitation
Feminist Ethics	Care, empathy, equality	Promotes ethical relationships between humans and nature
Social Ecology	Social causes of environmental problems	Connects ecological degradation with inequality and injustice
Intersectionality	Multiple forms of discrimination	Explains unequal environmental impacts on different social groups
Environmental Justice	Fair distribution of environmental resources	Advocates equal environmental rights for all communities
Deep Ecology	Intrinsic value of nature	Encourages biodiversity conservation and ecological balance
Indigenous Knowledge	Traditional ecological practices	Supports sustainable resource management
Literary	Representati	Interprets

Criticism	on of women and nature	environmental themes in contemporary literature
Sustainable Development	Balance of economy, society, and environment	Aligns ecofeminism with the SDGs
Climate Justice	Equity in climate impacts	Highlights gendered vulnerability to climate change

Source: Developed by the author based on Merchant (1980), Shiva (1988), Plumwood (1993), Gaard (2017), and IPCC (2023).

Table 3.2 Ecofeminist Principles and Their Literary Significance

Ecofeminist Principle	Literary Representation	Expected Outcome
Equality between humans and nature	Nature portrayed as a living entity	Environmental ethics
Women's empowerment	Women as environmental leaders	Gender equality
Ecological sustainability	Conservation and biodiversity	Sustainable development
Environmental justice	Resistance against ecological exploitation	Social justice
Indigenous knowledge	Traditional ecological wisdom	Community-based conservation
Climate resilience	Narratives of adaptation and recovery	Climate awareness
Ethical coexistence	Human–nature	Ecological harmony

	interdependence	
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Source: Author's compilation based on contemporary ecofeminist literature.

Table 3.3 Relationship Between Ecofeminism, Environmental Justice, and Sustainable Development Goals

Ecofeminist Dimension	Related Environmental Issue	Corresponding SDG
Gender equality	Women's environmental participation	SDG 5
Water conservation	Access to clean water	SDG 6
Climate justice	Climate adaptation and mitigation	SDG 13
Biodiversity conservation	Forest and ecosystem protection	SDG 15
Inclusive governance	Environmental rights and justice	SDG 16

Source: Developed by the author using the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2024).

4. Environmental Justice in Contemporary Literature

Environmental justice has become one of the most significant themes in contemporary literature as writers increasingly explore the unequal distribution of environmental benefits and burdens across different social groups. Unlike traditional environmental literature, which primarily celebrated the

beauty of nature, contemporary literary works critically examine how environmental degradation, climate change, pollution, deforestation, industrialization, mining, biodiversity loss, and resource exploitation disproportionately affect marginalized communities, particularly women, indigenous peoples, children, and economically disadvantaged populations. Environmental justice literature argues that ecological crises are not merely scientific or environmental issues but also social, political, cultural, and ethical concerns rooted in unequal power relations. Consequently, contemporary literature has evolved into an important medium for exposing environmental inequalities while promoting ecological sustainability, human rights, and social justice (Nixon, 2011; Heise, 2016).

One of the fundamental principles of environmental justice in literature is the recognition that environmental problems affect different communities unequally. Rapid industrialization, urbanization, and resource extraction have generated economic growth in many countries; however, these developments have often displaced vulnerable populations, degraded ecosystems, and increased environmental health risks. According to the United

Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2024), nearly one million plant and animal species are threatened with extinction, while pollution and habitat destruction continue to intensify globally. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2024) further estimates that approximately 99% of the world's population breathes air that exceeds recommended pollution limits, contributing to millions of premature deaths annually. Contemporary literary works frequently portray these realities by illustrating how marginalized communities suffer the greatest environmental consequences despite contributing the least to ecological degradation.

Climate change has significantly expanded the scope of environmental justice in contemporary literature. Extreme weather events, including floods, droughts, wildfires, hurricanes, rising sea levels, and heatwaves, increasingly appear as central themes in novels, poetry, and short stories. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023) reported that global average temperatures have increased by approximately 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels, resulting in widespread environmental disruption across ecosystems worldwide. Literary narratives increasingly depict climate change not only as an

environmental phenomenon but also as a humanitarian crisis involving displacement, food insecurity, poverty, migration, and social inequality. These narratives emphasize that climate-related disasters disproportionately affect women, indigenous populations, and economically disadvantaged communities because of unequal access to financial resources, education, healthcare, and political representation.

Women occupy a particularly significant position within environmental justice literature because they frequently experience greater vulnerability to ecological degradation while simultaneously acting as environmental leaders and community protectors. Ecofeminist writers argue that women often maintain closer relationships with natural resources through agriculture, water collection, forest conservation, food production, and household management. Consequently, environmental degradation directly influences their livelihoods, health, education, and family well-being. According to UN Women (2024), women constitute nearly 80% of people displaced by climate-related disasters, illustrating the gendered dimensions of environmental injustice. Contemporary literary works increasingly portray women not only as victims of

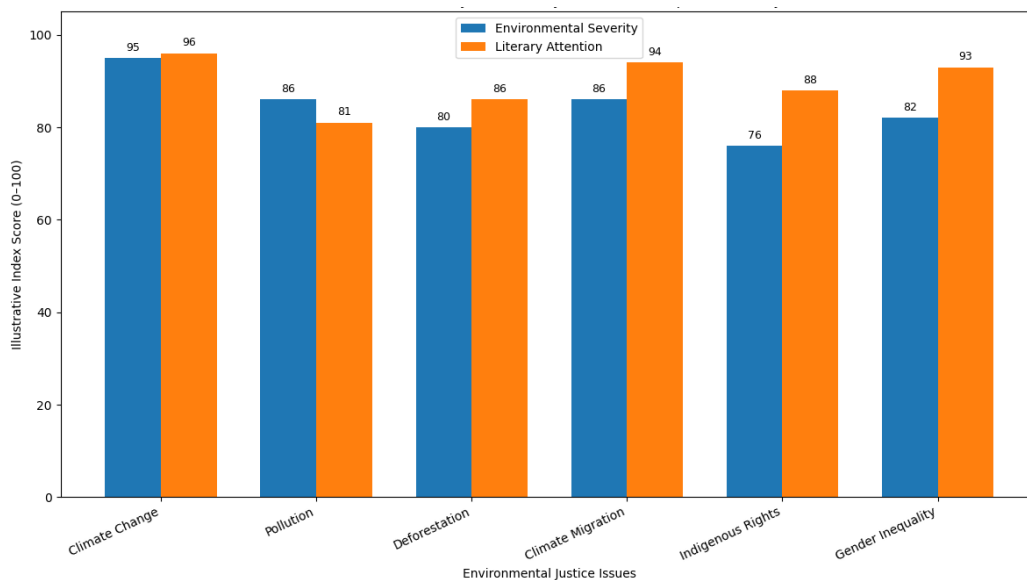
environmental exploitation but also as activists who challenge unsustainable development, environmental destruction, and social inequality through collective resistance and ecological stewardship.

Indigenous communities represent another central focus of environmental justice literature because of their longstanding cultural relationships with forests, rivers, biodiversity, wildlife, and traditional ecological knowledge. Contemporary authors frequently illustrate how mining, deforestation, infrastructure expansion, and commercial agriculture threaten indigenous territories, cultural identities, and sustainable livelihoods. Indigenous ecological knowledge is increasingly recognized as an important resource for biodiversity conservation and climate adaptation. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2024), indigenous peoples manage approximately one-quarter of the Earth's land surface, which contains nearly 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity. Contemporary literature highlights indigenous women as guardians of ecological wisdom, demonstrating that environmental conservation and cultural preservation are deeply interconnected. Environmental justice literature also examines the consequences of industrial

pollution and environmental racism. Many literary works describe communities living near factories, mining areas, hazardous waste sites, and polluted rivers where environmental regulations are weak or poorly enforced. These narratives reveal how poor and marginalized populations often face greater exposure to contaminated water, toxic chemicals, air pollution, and

hazardous working conditions than wealthier communities. Such representations challenge dominant economic development models by questioning whether industrial growth should occur at the expense of environmental health and human dignity. Through realistic storytelling, literature encourages readers to recognize pollution as both an ecological and a human rights issue.

Figure 1: Environmental Severity and Literary Attention



Source: Author's illustrative visualization based on the conceptual synthesis of contemporary ecofeminist and environmental justice literature.

This grouped bar graph compares the perceived severity of selected environmental justice issues with the level of attention they receive in contemporary literature. Climate change shows high values in both dimensions, while gender inequality, indigenous rights, climate migration, and deforestation receive greater literary

attention than their corresponding environmental severity scores. This indicates that contemporary literature frequently explores the social, cultural, and ethical consequences of ecological crises in addition to their physical environmental impacts.

5. Representation of Women and Nature in Contemporary Literary Works

Contemporary literature frequently represents women and nature as interconnected subjects affected by similar systems of domination, exploitation, and marginalization. Ecofeminist literary criticism examines how patriarchal, capitalist, colonial, and anthropocentric structures influence both women's lives and the natural environment. In modern novels, poetry, essays, and speculative fiction, women are represented not only as victims of environmental injustice but also as ecological thinkers, activists, caregivers, knowledge holders, and agents of resistance. Nature is likewise presented as more than a passive setting; it often functions as a living presence, cultural memory, source of identity, or symbol of resistance.

- ❖ **Women and Nature as Victims of Domination:** Many contemporary literary works portray women and nature as subjects exposed to comparable forms of control. Women may experience gender discrimination, violence, economic dependency, displacement, and political exclusion, while nature is subjected to deforestation, mining, pollution, industrial expansion, and

commercial exploitation. Ecofeminist writers use this parallel representation to demonstrate that gender oppression and ecological destruction often arise from the same hierarchical worldview.

Such narratives challenge the belief that women and natural resources exist primarily for the use of dominant social groups. By presenting the consequences of exploitation, contemporary literature questions development models based on unlimited consumption, centralized authority, and the destruction of local ecosystems.

- ❖ **Women as Environmental Caregivers:** Women are frequently represented as caregivers who maintain close relationships with land, water, forests, animals, and food systems. In rural and indigenous narratives, women collect water, cultivate crops, preserve seeds, manage household resources, and transmit environmental knowledge across generations. These responsibilities give them direct experience of environmental change and resource scarcity.

However, ecofeminist criticism warns against reducing women to naturally caring or inherently ecological figures. Contemporary writers increasingly show that women's environmental roles arise from social responsibilities, cultural traditions, material conditions, and lived experiences rather than biological destiny.

- ❖ **Women as Agents of Ecological Resistance:** Contemporary literary works often portray women as leaders of environmental resistance. Female characters challenge mining projects, deforestation, corporate control, industrial pollution, displacement, and the destruction of indigenous territories. Their resistance may take the form of public protest, community organization, storytelling, legal action, preservation of traditional knowledge, or everyday acts of survival.

Through these representations, literature transforms women from passive sufferers into active political subjects. Their struggles demonstrate that environmental justice requires participation, collective organization,

and the recognition of marginalized voices.

- ❖ **Nature as a Living Presence:** In ecofeminist literature, nature is not merely a background for human activity. Forests, rivers, animals, mountains, oceans, and climatic forces are frequently represented as active presences that influence human identity and social relationships. Nature may communicate through seasonal change, ecological disruption, bodily experience, memory, and cultural symbolism.

This representation challenges anthropocentrism, which places human interests above all other forms of life. By giving ecological systems narrative importance, contemporary authors emphasize interdependence between human communities and the more-than-human world.

- ❖ **Nature as a Symbol of the Female Body:** Some literary works establish symbolic relationships between the female body and the natural environment. Fertility, motherhood, land, water, growth, and seasonal renewal may be used to connect

women's bodily experiences with ecological processes. Environmental damage may also be represented through images of bodily injury, contamination, disease, or reproductive harm.

Although such symbolism can strengthen ecological awareness, it may also reinforce the stereotype that women are closer to nature while men are associated with reason and culture. Contemporary ecofeminist criticism therefore evaluates whether these representations empower women or reproduce traditional gender binaries.

- ❖ **Women's Bodies and Environmental Toxicity:** Recent literary narratives increasingly address the effects of polluted water, toxic chemicals, industrial waste, pesticides, and climate-related disease on women's bodies. Reproductive health, pregnancy, food safety, cancer, respiratory illness, and bodily contamination become important themes through which environmental injustice is represented. These works reveal that ecological damage enters human life through

air, water, soil, food, and bodily exposure. Women's bodies thus become sites where environmental inequality, economic exploitation, and public health injustice intersect.

6. Ecofeminism and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Ecofeminism and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) share a common vision of creating an environmentally sustainable, socially equitable, and economically inclusive world. While ecofeminism primarily examines the relationship between gender equality and environmental protection, the SDGs provide a global policy framework for addressing interconnected challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, poverty, food insecurity, gender discrimination, and environmental injustice. Contemporary literature increasingly reflects this convergence by portraying women as environmental leaders, emphasizing ecological conservation, and advocating sustainable lifestyles. Ecofeminist literary criticism demonstrates that achieving sustainable development requires not only technological innovation but also social transformation, environmental ethics, community participation, and gender justice.

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the United Nations in 2015 established 17 Sustainable Development Goals designed to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. Ecofeminist theory aligns particularly with goals related to gender equality, clean water, climate action, biodiversity conservation, responsible consumption, and peaceful institutions. According to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Report (2024), global progress remains uneven due to climate change, environmental degradation, economic inequality, and persistent gender disparities. Contemporary literature frequently reflects these global concerns by illustrating how environmental sustainability and social justice are inseparable components of human development.

- **Ecofeminism and SDG 5: Gender Equality:** Gender equality is one of the strongest areas of convergence between ecofeminism and the SDGs. Ecofeminist scholars argue that environmental sustainability cannot be achieved without equal participation of women in environmental governance, policy-making, natural resource management, and climate adaptation.

Contemporary literary works increasingly portray women as environmental activists, scientists, indigenous leaders, and community organizers who contribute significantly to ecological conservation.

According to UN Women (2024), women continue to face unequal access to land ownership, education, financial resources, and leadership opportunities despite being among the primary managers of household natural resources in many developing countries. Literary narratives demonstrate that empowering women improves community resilience, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable development outcomes.

- **Ecofeminism and SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation:** Access to safe water is central to both ecofeminism and sustainable development. Women in many societies bear primary responsibility for water collection, household sanitation, and family health, making them particularly vulnerable to water scarcity and pollution. Contemporary literature frequently depicts women's

struggles against contaminated rivers, industrial pollution, groundwater depletion, and unequal access to clean drinking water.

The WHO and UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (2024) estimates that approximately 2.2 billion people still lack safely managed drinking water services worldwide. Ecofeminist literature highlights that improving water governance requires gender-inclusive environmental policies and community participation.

- **Ecofeminism and SDG 13: Climate Action:** Climate change occupies a central position in contemporary ecofeminist discourse. Women, particularly in rural and indigenous communities, often experience disproportionate impacts from floods, droughts, food insecurity, and climate-induced displacement. Contemporary climate fiction increasingly portrays women as both victims and leaders in climate adaptation and disaster recovery. The IPCC (2023) concluded that climate change has intensified extreme weather events worldwide, threatening food security,

biodiversity, public health, and sustainable development. Ecofeminist literature emphasizes that effective climate action requires gender-sensitive adaptation strategies, environmental justice, and inclusive governance.

- **Ecofeminism and SDG 15: Life on Land:** Ecofeminism strongly supports biodiversity conservation and sustainable ecosystem management. Contemporary literary works frequently portray forests, wildlife, rivers, wetlands, and agricultural landscapes as interconnected with human identity and community survival. Women often appear as guardians of biodiversity through seed preservation, forest management, medicinal plant conservation, and traditional ecological knowledge. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (2024), nearly one million species face extinction due to habitat destruction, pollution, invasive species, and climate change. Ecofeminist narratives encourage conservation by emphasizing ethical relationships

between humans and the natural environment.

➤ **Ecofeminism and SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production:**

Ecofeminism challenges consumerism and unsustainable economic growth by promoting responsible production, ethical consumption, recycling, biodiversity conservation, and circular economic practices. Contemporary literature critiques excessive industrialization, plastic pollution, overconsumption, and resource exploitation while encouraging sustainable lifestyles and ecological responsibility.

Many literary works demonstrate that environmental sustainability depends not only on technological innovation but also on changing human values, consumption patterns, and relationships with nature.

➤ **Ecofeminism and SDG 2: Zero Hunger:** Agriculture forms an important intersection between ecofeminism and sustainable development. Women contribute significantly to food production, seed preservation, nutrition, and household food security, particularly

in developing countries. Contemporary literature frequently portrays women farmers protecting biodiversity through traditional farming practices and sustainable agriculture.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (2024) emphasizes that women produce a substantial proportion of the world's food while facing unequal access to land, technology, financial services, and agricultural education. Ecofeminist literature argues that food security depends upon protecting both biodiversity and women's rights.

7. Conclusion

Ecofeminism provides a valuable interdisciplinary framework for understanding how environmental degradation, gender inequality, social exclusion, and unsustainable development are interconnected. The exploitation of forests, rivers, land, animals, and other natural resources frequently occurs within the same social and economic systems that marginalize women, indigenous peoples, and economically vulnerable communities. Contemporary literature exposes these relationships by presenting ecological destruction not merely as a scientific

problem but as an issue of power, justice, identity, health, and human survival.

The study demonstrates that contemporary literary works have moved beyond portraying nature as a passive background. Nature increasingly appears as a living presence, a source of cultural identity, a victim of exploitation, and sometimes an active force influencing human life. Similarly, women are no longer represented only as passive sufferers of environmental crises. They emerge as activists, community organizers, farmers, scientists, indigenous knowledge holders, caregivers, and leaders of ecological resistance. These representations challenge patriarchal and anthropocentric ideas that treat women and nature as inferior resources available for domination.

Environmental justice remains central to this literary discourse because ecological risks are distributed unequally. Climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, deforestation, and environmental displacement generally place heavier burdens on communities with fewer economic and political resources. The IPCC has concluded that vulnerable populations that have historically contributed least to climate change are disproportionately affected by its impacts. This observation

supports the ecofeminist argument that environmental crises cannot be addressed without confronting existing inequalities in access to resources, decision-making, and institutional protection.

Recent global data further demonstrate the urgency of connecting ecofeminism with sustainable development. The *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025* indicates that progress towards the 2030 Agenda remains insufficient and calls for accelerated action in major areas such as food systems, education, employment and social protection, climate action, and biodiversity conservation. These priority areas are directly connected with ecofeminist concerns because women's economic security, ecological well-being, and community resilience are influenced by the quality of food, water, land, employment, and environmental governance.

Gender inequality continues to obstruct sustainable development. According to the *Gender Snapshot 2025*, none of the gender-equality targets are currently on track for achievement by 2030. If present trends continue, approximately 351 million women and girls could still be living in extreme poverty by the end of the decade. This projection illustrates that SDG 5 cannot be achieved separately from poverty reduction,

climate justice, education, healthcare, decent employment, and access to natural and financial resources.

Climate change is likely to deepen these inequalities further. UN Women estimates that climate change could push as many as 158 million additional women and girls into poverty and 236 million more women into hunger by 2050. Such projections strengthen the relevance of ecofeminist analysis because they show that environmental disruption has clearly gendered social and economic consequences. Women's inclusion in climate planning, agricultural policy, disaster management, and environmental governance is therefore essential not only for equality but also for effective and durable climate action.

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