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# INTERSECTIONALITY AND THE CHANGING FACE OF ECOFEMINISM

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## *Abstract*

With its longstanding commitment to intersectional analysis, ecofeminism has always concerned itself with understanding the unique experiences of those who face discrimination, but it is only recently that ecofeminists have come to label their work as explicitly intersectional. This paper will examine the changing nature of ecofeminism and the importance of continuing to work within an intersectional framework. I will begin by reviewing the genealogy of intersectionality and ecofeminism, before exploring the current directions which intersectional ecofeminism is taking and the limitations which challenge intersectional theorisation. I will demonstrate the importance of an intersectional Indian ecofeminist approach, by exploring the complex circumstances surrounding the management of menstrual hygiene amongst young women in rural India: an issue which if approached non-intersectionally, would effectively silence their struggle.

## INTRODUCTION TO INTERSECTIONALITY

The term intersectionality, which is generally attributed to Kimberlé Crenshaw, began as a metaphorical and conceptual tool used to highlight the inability of a single-axis framework to capture the lived experiences of black women. Whilst many disciplines (including ecofeminism) have used the 'tools' of intersectionality before 1989, modern day usage of the term is usually associated with Crenshaw's specific approach. The development of Crenshaw's intersectionality, originated from the failure of both feminist and anti-racist discourse; to represent and capture the specificity of the discrimination faced by black women. This failure resulted from an inability

to identify the multiple grounds which constitute an individual's identity; meaning that well-intentioned scholarship was unable to acknowledge and address the specific ways in which race and gender could mutually reinforce discrimination against black women. Crenshaw's metaphor of the traffic intersection, representing the multiplicity and complexity of varying oppressions faced by black women, is one which has stood the test of time. Feminist and ecofeminist intersectionality attempts to attend to the variety of ways in which women live and the range of circumstances, which influence their often vastly differing experiences.

By using the tools of intersectionality to help illuminate the interconnectedness of race, class, gender, disability, sexuality, caste, religion, age and the effects which these can have (in their many and uniquely constituted forms) on the discrimination, oppression, and identity of women and the natural environment. While intersectionality was first used to describe the particular experiences of black women; it was further developed as an analytic tool by feminists, hoping to address and resolve the most fundamental and contentious of concerns within feminist scholarship—i.e. the existence of differences between women. The intersectional project has provided ecofeminism (and feminism) with a convenient opportunity to confront some of the skeletons in its closet, forcing the discipline to challenge a past which was too often essentialist and exclusionary.

Mari J. Matsuda described the potentially simple methodology of recognising the interconnection of all discrimination, as one which required an openness to 'asking the other question.' In her 1991 article in the *Stanford Law Review*, Matsuda demonstrated the importance of recognizing that any one type of subordination rarely (if ever) stands alone, she states "When I see something that looks racist, I ask, 'Where is the patriarchy in this?' When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, 'Where is the heterosexism in this?'" and "When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, 'Where are the class interests in this?'" (1189). This 'asking of the other question' allows for the exposition of hidden forms of prejudice and discrimination, by exposing the various disadvantages and privileges which make up the lived experiences and complex identities of every individual e.g. the black woman, the male Mexican migrant worker, or the North American female university professor. Asking the other question is a useful practical device which promotes a basic awareness of the multiplicity of experience, but it also serves as a reminder to remain aware of one's potential prejudices.

Reflecting upon one's position, especially when speaking from a point of privilege, helps to avoid the unintentional marginalization of other groups or identities, as was the case with black women in the feminist

and anti-racist movements. As a simple theoretical device, Matsuda's 'asking of the other question' serves as an adequately functional model and a good springboard towards intersectional analysis, but the subsequent development of intersectionality has evolved into something more substantial. The success of intersectionality in feminist and ecofeminist work points to the self-reflectivity of both disciplines and to the capacity of intersectionality to be interpreted and practiced in multiple ways, though this is a point of contention for some (Nash 2008). The diversity of intersectional theory can be seen through the wide range of fields carrying out work on intersectionality in theoretical grounding, methodology, or practice; including sociology, psychology, politics, feminism, post-colonial, queer and women's gender studies, anti-racist scholarship, ecofeminism, development research, and environmentalism. Crenshaw's original metaphor of a crossroads or traffic intersection, that seized the imagination of so many, has been adopted, adapted and sometimes replaced in favor of an entire rainbow of metaphors that all attempt in some way to capture the peculiar richness of the concept.

Intersectionality has been described as a complexity (McCall 2005), a continuum (Mehrotra 2010), a lens (MacGregor 2010), a paradigm (Winker & Degele 2011 and Hulko 2009), an axis or axes (Yuval Davis 2006), a crossroads with a roundabout (Garry 2011), a critical praxis (Hill Collins 2015), a matrix of domination (Bilge 2010 and Hill Collins, 2015), a framework (Anthias 2012), a 'nodal point' (Lykke 2005), a rhizome (Lykke 2010) or even a mountain with liquids of uneven viscosity running down it and mixing together (Garry 2011). The sheer volume and variance of interpretations, metaphors and methodologies within intersectional literature (of which only a few have been mentioned) clearly depicts the 'story' of intersectional theory, one which is as broad and encompassing as intersectionality itself is often professed to be. The prolificacy of the metaphors used to describe intersectionality points to its complexity as a concept, which can be difficult to illustrate in non-metaphorical terms. Perhaps due to my background in environmental philosophy, I have always approached intersectionality as being more of a web of entanglement, than a traffic junction or road. Each spoke of the web representing a continuum of different types of social categorisation such as gender, sexuality, race, or class; while encircling spirals depict individual identities. The spirals collide with each spoke at a different level of the continuum, illustrating the context-specific privilege or discrimination experienced by the individual. A spider's web preserves the necessary complexity of

intersectionality and the potential ‘stickiness’ of cultural categories, which can often leave people stuck between two or more intersecting or conflicting social categories.

### EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Leslie McCall heralded intersectionality as “the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies...has made.” (2005, 1771). However, despite its enormous success appealing to a wide audience; the absence of feminist methodologies for the use of intersectionality is concerning. The success of intersectionality can be explained in part, by its ability to capture the imagination of the academic masses, which must first appeal to a ‘primary’ concern of its audience and then offer a potential solution to the most fundamental and disturbing of the audience’s concerns, a problem which threatens “to destroy their ideally immovable valued object.” (Murray Davis 1986, 290). As a result, the audience will be compelled to accept and engage with the theory or risk having to ‘give up’ an essential part of their academic belief system (Kathy Davis 2008, 70). Intersectionality’s success within feminist scholarship could be understood (at least in part) as being a result of its ability to address a central theoretical and practical concern shared by eco/feminist scholars—namely, of the differences between women.

Intersectionality promises to avoid the common traps of ‘essential difference’ by looking beyond the categories which dominated essentialism debates in the 1980s and 1990s. A second and related part of a successful theory can be found in its ability to provide a new and novel interpretation to an old problem (Murray Davis 1971, 343), one which helps to create an exciting new area of dialogue within an academic discipline. On the other hand, a theory which merely confirms or denies that which we already know to be the case will fail to have the mass-market appeal that a completely new idea would be able to generate. Intersectionality offered a ‘new twist’ on critical ecofeminism by offering a “nodal point” (Lykke 2005) for disparate approaches to contribute to ecofeminist scholarship and explore the effects of sexism, class, homophobia, caste systems, and racism on women and their relationship with the environment. It allows for the cross-examination of issues from differing theoretical backgrounds using a wide range of methodological approaches, which as part of a larger post-structuralist project: attempts to deconstruct categories and unveil the universalism at play in ecofeminist and feminist scholarship.

Although all intersectional theorists share a belief in the need for research to recognize the complexity of discrimination and identity; the epistemological position of the practitioners of intersectional theory cannot and should not be taken for granted. This is illustrated in the differing approaches taken by researchers, with regards to their beliefs about the epistemic standing of social categorization. Leslie McCall identifies the main three approaches or ‘complexities’ of intersectionality as being either *anticategorical*, *intracategorical*, or *intercategorical* (2005, 1773). *Anticategorical* complexity attempts to deconstruct the categories themselves, and in doing so, McCall posits that it is the most complex and thus most successful form of intersectionality, regarding its ability to provide complexity. The second *intercategorical* approach requires that researchers temporarily adopt pre-existing social categories so that they may document the inequalities along the many axes of power: McCall identifies her work as fitting within this epistemological category or complexity.

The third and final complexity is *intracategorical*, which McCall states, “inaugurated intersectionality” (1773–74). This approach falls between the two others, one of which rejects categories and the other, that uses them ‘strategically.’ An *intracategorical* approach focuses on particular social groups at “neglected points of intersection” (1774) and is typically used in case studies. Whereas an *intercategorical* approach accepts (strategically at least) the current constitution of social groups in order to examine the changes in the inequalities between social categories, this approach is not concerned with understanding or challenging the definition or depiction of groups but rather with quantifying the relationships and inequalities between socially constructed categories. It is likely that much (although certainly not all) intersectional ecofeminist and feminist theory would fall within the parameters of an *intracategorical* approach. On the one hand, ecofeminism recognizes the durability of social categories, while on the other, challenges the foundation which such categorizations rest.

While some ecofeminists remain committed to *anticategorical* ideals, in practice it is often necessary to adopt more of an *intracategorical* (or even *intercategorical*) approach. Such approaches, especially an *intracategorical* one, allow for an acknowledgement of the role of social categories in society, but also, an ability to focus on neglected groups, whilst also making room for scepticism towards current methods of social categorization. Although Audre Lorde’s *Sister Outsider* (1984), predates our contemporary understanding of intersectionality, regarding the complexities of inequality, her *intracategorical* approach, illustrates the importance of

acknowledging the existence of social categories. Lorde criticised the propensity of the women's movement to ignore issues of race and class, in favour of promoting a sisterhood which does not, in fact, exist (116). Differences of skin color or class do not prevent this sisterhood, but rather a refusal to acknowledge these differences or believing them to be insurmountable; prevents discrimination from being successfully challenged. An *anticategorical* approach seeks to dismantle social categories, whereas Lorde's *intracategorical* method provides an acknowledgement of the flaws within our understanding of social categories, while also recognizing the current structures of oppression and the power structures responsible for them.

McCall's interpretation of the 'complex inequality' of intersectionality provides the theoretical justification for focusing on certain groups at neglected points of an intersection; making it easier to go beyond theoretical claims, by instead producing work which has the potential to directly influence policy, affecting both women and nature. McCall's 'three complexities' of intersectionality offer a range of epistemological positions for the potential practitioner of intersectional research. However, by focusing solely on either the macro or micro level of power relations and social categories, research risks ignoring inequalities resulting from other levels of social structures. Some, such as Winker and Degele, have suggested that intersectionality requires a multi-level approach (or MLA) which takes into account the interactions between the three levels of inequality construction (2011, 54).

The scope of this paper does not allow for me to provide an in-depth analysis of the eight steps of the multi-level intersectional analysis recommended by Winker and Degele. However, it is important to draw attention to the three levels (or aspects) of analysis identified by both themselves and Sandra Harding (1986) as being: identity constructions, symbolic representations, and social structures. Appreciating all three of these levels is a tricky process, but one which is necessary in order to successfully analyze the structures of power which influence all social relations from the individual to the international. A multi-level approach takes into account the ability of individuals to constitute their individual identity, the concrete relations of power and their supporting symbolic representations. Winker and Degele's multi-level approach and their proposed methodological framework is a marked attempt to move away from vague rhetoric, instead offering a context-driven and integrative social practice.

Understandably, many have expressed concern at the enthusiastic adoption of intersectionality by the feminist community, given its lack of clarity as a theoretical tool. Concern over the applicability of intersectionality has generally focused on its methodology as feminists face the problem of what to do after engaging with Matsuda's asking of 'the other question.' The broadness of intersectional approaches can be overwhelming; some feminists have expressed concern over the seemingly endless list of intersections to which we must address if one is to use intersectionality 'correctly.' Judith Butler notes the 'etc.' which comes after many feminist lists (sexism, classism, speciesism, homophobia, etc.) of social cleavages/divisions (Butler 1989, 143) and sees it as an embarrassed "sign of exhaustion" on the part of ecofeminists (Yuval-Davis 2006, 202). Others have argued that the notion of intersectionality would greatly benefit from a 'universal definition' (Verloo 2006) which could provide scholars with a rigid methodological framework of how to use intersectionality in ecofeminist theory. Moreover, those such as Winker and Degele have successfully offered a stricter methodological framework from which to operate. It is nevertheless necessary to point out that a critique of intersectionality, based upon either a desire for universality or fatigue with the broadness of categories to be considered, is likely to be derived from a position of privilege. The existence of intersectionality originally stemmed from the inability of mainstream feminism to recognize its privileged position, so too does non-intersectional feminism today.

By being neither too complicated nor too simple, intersectionality has the capacity to draw a wide audience from the full feminist spectrum. While some have accused ecofeminism of losing relevance and becoming the theoretical preserve of an academic elite (Stanley and Wise 2000, 276). Intersectionality has helped to develop the practical application of ecofeminism by 'initiating a process of discovery' (Davis 2008, 7) by acting as an analytic tool or 'lens' to aid critical thinking on ecofeminist debates. The theory's ambiguity allows for intersectionality to be interpreted and utilized in an almost infinite number of ways, and although it does not fit sociology's criteria for a typically 'good' conceptual theory, it does fit the criterion for a good feminist theory, as discussed by Judith Butler and Joan Scott (1992). Butler and Scott describe a good feminist theory as one which is able to generate discussion, analysis and research, while also opening up the floor for feminists to proceed into areas that had previously provided constraints (xiii).



The place of good ecofeminist theory is not necessarily to provide ultimate answers, but rather to allow for critical engagement with the multitude experiences contributing to the discrimination of women and the environment, while at the same time recognising the limitations and constraints of one's analysis. In the following section, I will outline a brief genealogy of ecofeminist thought in order to trace the use and importance of intersectionality. I will go on to explore the ways in which intersectional ecofeminist thought, although not always explicitly referenced as intersectional, is an ever growing and integral part of ecofeminism's future.

### ECOFEMINISM AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectional research broadly falls into three main categories: theory, methodology, and application. Each category tends to grapple with one central question, respectively: What is intersectionality? How do we use intersectionality? And, what does intersectional research demonstrate? One might be forgiven for thinking that ecofeminism does not 'do' intersectionality, much less fit into any of the above categories, but this would be a mistake. While the explicit use of the term intersectionality originated in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it is an insufficiently acknowledged fact that ecofeminists have been 'doing intersectionality' for many years before Crenshaw first explicitly defined it in 1989. Ecological feminism or ecofeminism is an area of academic study concerned with understanding the interconnected relationship between the domination of women and the domination of nature.

It is the central contention of ecofeminist political philosophy that the oppressions of women and nature are linked "conceptually, historically, materially but not essentially" (Mallory 2010, 309)—that is, at least not any more or less essentially than their male counterparts. Ecofeminism recognizes the ethical interconnection of the domination of women and the domination and exploitation of nature. The historical precedent which separates and sets humans above nature is also responsible for enforcing the 'violent rupture' between humankind and nature—which helps to render humanity ignorant of its duty towards the natural environment and the non-human other. Ecofeminists highlight that this dualistic conception of culture/nature seeks to maintain both the "ecological superiority of humans and the cultural superiority of men" (Mallory 2010, 309), meaning that the liberation of women cannot be achieved without the simultaneous liberation of nature from the clutches of exploitation.

Ecofeminism explores the twin oppressions experienced by women and nature in an attempt to understand their shared destiny (Dobson 1995, 187). Inextricably linked to the merged destinies of women and nature is the idea that humanity itself is inseparable from nature as a whole and as such, the damage inflicted upon nature by humans invariably leads to harm being inflicted upon all of humankind and not just women. Although, ecofeminist intersectionality recognizes that women are likely to be amongst those most affected by environmental degradation, with those at the margins of society often experiencing these effects earliest and to the harshest degree. The attempt to reconcile and improve upon the relationship between humankind and nature is central to *ecological feminist* thought, as is the belief (in some cases at least) that by applying the lens of intersectionality to analysis, one is better able to understand and assess the complex relationship between humans (specifically women) and the natural world.

The cornerstone of intersectional theory echoes the sentiment of the oft-quoted phrase, uttered most famously by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. that ‘No one is free until we are all free’ (Babbit and Campbell 1999, 205). This phrase, used much through the sixties civil rights movement, captured the spirit of a generation, highlighting the inability of white or black people to be truly free until the other is. Intersectional ecofeminism builds upon this foundation by further postulating that the ‘freedom’ of humanity is not only reliant on the freedom of nature and women, but it is also reliant on the achievement of liberation for all of those at intersecting points on along these fault lines. Intersectionality has become a powerful tool when applied to ecofeminist analysis of the relationship between women and the environment, particularly in its ability to assist in furthering our understanding of how a person’s relationship with the environment (in the Global South or North) is not completely dependent on any one aspect of their lives, whether gender, race, class, sexuality or age but rather a combination of all of the above and more besides. As an analytic tool, it can be used to further understand the relationship that all women, including those in the Global South, have with their environment, without relying on gender typing or reducing an experience to the sole category of gender.

For more than thirty years, ecofeminism has been taking into account the interconnected nature of social categories such as gender, race, class, sexuality, caste, species, religion, nationality, dis/ability, and issues such as colonialism. It has also challenged anthropocentric modes of thought, by

incorporating both species and the natural environment into the ongoing debate concerning the workings of social categorization and identity construction. However, we need to be careful in characterizing earlier ecofeminist work as intersectional. Although it is certainly true that ecofeminism did often engage with intersectional approaches, it did not adopt intersectionality as the conceptual tool we currently understand it to be. A conflation of intersectionality with the non-explicit ecofeminist use of intersectional concepts risks reducing the important and often original theoretical and practical contributions, which intersectionality has made to academia.

However, there are many examples within early ecofeminism (and its antecedents) which clearly display engagement with the multiple dimensions of social categories. For instance, Mary Daly discussed the way in which class intersected with women's experiences of discrimination (1978) in her historical account of the development of radical feminism. Val Plumwood claimed that gender, race, class, and nature were the tectonic plates of liberation theory (1993, 1) and that the interfacing of indigeneity, gender, nation, species, and class were essential (53) in overcoming the man's mastery of nature. Carol J. Adams in 'The Sexual Politics of Meat' (1990) included animals within the ecofeminist framework: to explore the links between meat eating and patriarchy. Environmental and feminist activism have also led the way in deconstructing barriers, by promoting and encouraging 'intersectional' dialogue. An edited collection of writings published by the International Women's Movement entitled, 'Sisterhood is Global' (Morgan 1984) included work which attended to the full array of social categories (including class, race, and colonialism/national identity) and the way in which these categories influenced and intersected upon each other.

In more recent times, ecofeminists have explicitly invoked intersectionality throughout their work and used it to both promote inclusivity and to explore the ways in which intersectional analysis can improve upon ecofeminist thought. Although it is difficult to find much ecofeminist work that explicitly presents itself as intersectional (according to our current understanding of the term), it appears that this is quickly changing. While ecofeminism was using the ideas of intersectionality long before it came to be defined as intersectionality, it is now transitioning through a post-definition phase and into a period of application. It is important to remain vigilant in continuing to evaluate the epistemic positioning of intersectional theory, but this can now be done alongside the practical application of the theory in fieldwork.

Intersectional ecofeminist work has been particularly prominent in research concerning both climate change and human relations with the non-human other; recent work has highlighted the uneven distribution of environmental burdens and the necessity of incorporating species into intersectionality. Deborah Slicer (2015), Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen (2015), and Richard Twine (2010) have all explored the issues surrounding the use of an intersubjective, inter-species, and intersectional approach towards environmentalism, feminism, and ecofeminism. Others, such as Greta Gaard (2015) and Sherilyn MacGregor (2010) have added an explicitly intersectional ecofeminist voice to the growing body of intersectional work concerning climate change. Chris J. Cuomo and Nancy Tuana's specially edited issue of *Hypatia* (2014) highlighted the growing interest in intersectional approaches towards climate change, with papers contributing to ongoing research concerning the gendered impacts of climate change and the epistemological underpinning of an intersectional ecological feminist approach. This work not only illustrates the unequal impacts of climate change, which tend to affect those in the Global South more seriously than those in the North, but also how context-specific social structures can influence a person's vulnerability with respect to a changing environment.

Intersectional theory is important in helping to recognize these unequal experiences, not just between the North and South but also within these very broad and non-homogenous categorizations (i.e. poorer, rural women will likely experience more vulnerability than a middle-class urbanite). Research has shown that (particularly in rural areas of the Global South) it is most often women, who bear the brunt of the extra burdens created by climate change and environmental degradation. Examples of this include: having to travel further to collect water/food each day, higher risk of reproductive/fertility health issues caused by drinking from a contaminated water supply, and being more likely to die in an ecological disaster than their male counterparts (UN 2009). In spite of research clearly demonstrating the increased vulnerability of women to environmental threats and the economic, social, and political barriers, preventing women from being involved in decision-making processes, much environmental and climate research remains ignorant to issues of gender, class, race, caste, and sexuality. This issue is illustrated in the debate surrounding overpopulation, which is often presented as the root of all environmental evil, with population control seen as the natural 'cure-all' solution. The popularity of the 'population control argument' (Seager 2003, 969) points to some deeply troubling assumptions about women

(particularly from the Global South) and their role in climate change mitigation and also their potential blameworthiness for the environmental problems of the twenty-first century. Focus on population control not only leads to governmental interference with the female body but it also masks two of the real culprits behind climate change: overconsumption and corporate greed. An intersectional ecofeminism helps to avoid this type of limited analysis: which establishes conclusions and recommendations based upon a very specific, cultural, historical, and contextual epoch.

Clearly, the need for intersectional analysis has never been more real, which is why the lack of a *widespread* consensus about approaching issues such as climate change and environmental degradation in an intersectional manner is all the more worrying. Climate change is a ‘wicked problem’ in the sense that it cannot be successfully understood in any way which is not intersectional. Attempts to do so inevitably lead to confusion, and ultimately to failure because they fail to recognize and account for the complex nature of the impacts and burdens of climate change, which often disproportionately affect those at neglected points of an intersection. Intersectionality (under an *intracategorical* approach) encourages the acknowledgement of the current structures of power under which we exist, and by temporarily stabilizing social categories, it allows researchers the opportunity to offer more constructive and culturally sensitive analyses. In the following section, I will examine the ways in which intersectional ecofeminism has developed in India and how it can help us to better understand the experiences of women.

### INDIAN ECOFEMINISM AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Synonymous with the phrase ‘Indian ecofeminism’ or ‘Indian environmentalism’ is the academic, writer, and activist: Vandana Shiva, who can be described as the most influential and articulate advocate of ‘third world’ ecofeminism (Shoba 2013, 40). Shiva, in her foundational work, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India* (1988) states that women’s environmentalism in India precedes ecofeminism as found in the West in events such as the UN’s ‘women’s’ decade (1988, 64) or the Clayoquot or Greenham Common encampments. The roots of women’s involvement with the environmental movement in India can be traced back as far as three hundred years, to the beginning of the Chipko movement, when 300 women in Rajasthan sacrificed their lives to protect sacred *khejri* trees. Shiva claims that Indian ecofeminism has the potential to “lay the

foundations for the recovery of the feminine principle in nature and society” (1988, 215); which is important because, the ‘feminine principle’ (which is also known in Hindu as Shakti or Prakriti) is the “living force that supports life” (Shiva, 1988, xvii).

This notion forms part of a dramatically different vision of humanity’s relationship with the environment, compared to the traditional Western Cartesian conception of reality which enforces notions of the duality between men/women and person/nature. In Indian cosmology, it is the idea of unity, not a dichotomy, which Shiva claims helps to inform an ‘ethic of care’ towards the environment (39–40) which makes the relationship between women and nature not simply a socially developed ‘intimacy’ but a biologically necessary one.

Women in the Global South have developed an intimacy with their natural surroundings in an attempt to protect and preserve local resources. Moreover, women, through their role as ‘producers’ both socially and reproductively, are uniquely able to understand “the costs of technologies which pillage the Earth’s natural riches” and help provide potential solutions to them (Diamond & Orenstein 1990, x). Shiva’s claims are similar to those made by Carol Christ, Starhawk and Charlene Spretnak in 1990 in that they place women as close to nature socially, culturally, *and* biologically and enthusiastically adopt the notion of a spiritual ecofeminism.

Shiva’s belief that the subjugation of the feminine principle is responsible for the continued exploitation of both women and the environment does little to contradict the labelling of her work as essentialist. Problematically, Shiva fails to address the patriarchal structures within Hinduism or to interrogate the principles of Prakriti (the feminine principle) and Purusha (the masculine principle) themselves, as contributing to and being part of a complex structure of social, political, and religious relations, under the influence of an oppressive caste system. In taking her research from rural communities in the northwest of India and using it to make generalizations about the entire Global South, Shiva ignored the vastly differing experiences of women from other backgrounds. Shiva’s ‘essentialist views’ have been strongly rejected by Bina Agarwal (1998) and Meera Nanda (1991, 2005) as a form of ‘cultural ecofeminism’ which romanticizes the role of women and their relationship with the environment. Such romantic outlooks about the relationship between women and nature, of the kind discussed by Archana Prasad in *Against Ecological Romanticism* (2011), reinforce gendered stereotypes

and prevent the development of a mutually beneficial dialogue. Shiva's oversimplified version of Hinduism illustrates her uncritical views concerning the domination of women and the environment in India and the Global South. In assuming that the notion of the 'feminine principle' is relevant to all women, and not just a small pocket of practicing Hindus in Northern India, Shiva only alienates those who would benefit most from her work.

As a socialist feminist, Shiva also argues that the Western patriarchal and capitalist worldview is responsible for the majority of Indian and 'Third World' environmental degradation (Shiva 1988, 219). Such degradation is particularly prevalent in the form of

"maldevelopment" (4) a term coined by Shiva to describe the processes of 'development' taking place without consideration of an ethic of ecological protection and conservation. Maldevelopment is a very real environmental issue, but Shiva gives an intellectually disingenuous portrayal of the West as the sole inventors of science (Nanda 2005, 178). Who, under the guise of development (postcolonialism), have been solely responsible for the degradation of the environment in India and the rest of the Global South. Shiva's emphasis on outside factors as being responsible for the subjugation of women and nature in India prevents us from seeing other forms of oppression in the Global South, particularly institutionalised and structural discrimination. Agarwal and Sowmya Dechamma (2011) have noted that Shiva has ignored pre-existing inequalities such as "caste, class, power, privilege, and property relations which predate colonialism" (Agarwal in Rao 2012, 130), all of which are likely to have had a significant role in the creation of current systems of domination.

Agarwal herself presents an intersectional form of ecofeminism termed *feminist environmentalism* (Agarwal 2000, 300) which she uses to relate women and ecology while also taking into account the influence of class, gender, and caste on the structures of power. Agarwal claims that the relationship women share with the environment is not biologically determined but rather one which is variable. The 'closeness' of their relationship and the greater interest that women may take in the preservation and protection of natural resources, as compared to their male counterparts, has more to do with their role in society as based on class and caste than it does with any necessary or biological connection. The division of resources and labor are factors which greatly influence gender differences in attitudes towards the conservation of the environment, with rural

women more likely to take an active role in its protection given the degree of their dependency on nature for subsistence and survival. As such, any ecofeminist account of Indian environmentalism must be sensitive to these factors, including class, culture, and ethnicity, when making observations and conclusions about the connection and relationship that women have with the natural world.

Attempts to romanticise the relationship between women and nature by first universalising the experience of ‘one kind of woman’ and then appealing to some essential ‘essence’ or necessary connection, leads those into a trap whereby one becomes blinded to the multitude of ways in which the concept of ‘womanhood’ is implicated in the continued constraints and exploitations experienced by women and the natural environment. The divorce of mankind from the natural world (where women supposedly reside) allows for women to be perceived as being closer to nature, when in reality they are as much part of nature as the rest of humanity, whereas the achievement of manhood seems to be entirely dependent upon men distancing themselves from this fact.

Much of the concern about the functionality of ecofeminism, lies in determining the conditions of womanhood, if indeed there are any. This ongoing epistemological debate (Brandy Daniels 2016) is one which not only affects ecofeminism but the foundations of feminism as a whole. This debate (necessary though it is) should not and has not stopped ‘real’ research from being conducted in the meantime, it is this to which I shall now turn. I will illustrate how intersectionality has the potential to be used in India to aid in the ecofeminist inquiry concerning (in this particular case) the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (2, 3, and 7) and the future achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

### **INTERSECTIONAL ECOFEMINISM IN INDIA AND THE CASE OF MENSTRUAL HYGIENE**

Ecofeminist research cannot successfully be completed while primarily referring only to the socially constructed category of gender because doing so does not demonstrate sensitivity to the potential complexity of issues involved or reflect the multitude of inter-connecting factors which influence the outcomes. Failure to incorporate other factors such as caste, class, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality into ecofeminist analysis by focusing solely on gender will severely limit the ability of researchers to interpret actions and offer practical and informative critique on the



nature of oppressions experienced by both women and nature. The role of gender in the oppression of rural, Dalit, and tribal women living in India, might have a smaller part to play than the influence of the caste system.

Carr and Thompson claim that the identification of gender can no longer suffice in the analysis of the real complexities of life experienced by women in the Global South (2013, 213). This point is further justified by Banerjee and Bell's 'shocking' discovery that references to gender constituted "less than 3.9% of articles in the top five social science journals [between 1980–2005]" (2007, 4). It is important that ecofeminism takes the notion of intersectionality and the influence of 'other' factors such as caste seriously if it is to be effective in analysing so-called 'women's issues' in the Global South. Especially considering that current ecofeminist scholarship has not, so far at least, fully explored the relationship between Dalits and environmentalism. Using intersectionality as an analytic tool, one would be able to fully explore these multileveled points of intersection and in doing so create a more compelling (and thorough) analysis of the twin dominations of women and nature. Using intersectionality in ecofeminist analysis helps to promote a holistic approach to issues in the Global South as wide-ranging as, climate change, land rights, women's empowerment, activism, tribal movements, and even problems such as women's equality in education and menstrual hygiene.

The Millennium Development Goals set out at the 2000 UN Summit for Development, aimed to put "development at the heart of the political agenda" (Unterhalter 2005, 11). However, few low-income countries were ever on target for achieving these goals by 2015 (Cohen et al. 2014), and if these levels of progress are to be improved upon by 2030 (the end-date of the Sustainable Development Goals), then intersectional approaches must be foregrounded. Menstrual hygiene is a good example of an issue which has multiple connections relating to environmental injustice, especially as menstrual hygiene and its management was a neglected condition of achieving several of the MDGs, including MDG7 which promoted sustainable development. Achievement of MDG7 and its related SDGs (e.g. 3, 6, 7, and 13) will remain impossible until the environmental injustices, caused by a lack of sustained attention to menstrual hygiene management, are tackled. In order to address these 'injustices' governments, political actors and charities must ensure that women have access to clean safe toilets, proper sanitary protection, and (especially important in this context) availability of an appropriate and environmentally sound

method of waste disposal. The prejudices women face on a daily basis, stemming from issues concerning their menstrual hygiene, are often more to do with factors such as class, religion, ethnicity, and caste, than gender. The experiences of a female subsistence farmer in rural India, for example, will be wildly different to those of a female university lecturer in urban India. Their variable experiences will be based on differing upbringings, ethnicity, and class, with the former much more likely to have experienced issues relating to their access to menstrual management facilities (Oster and Thornton 2010, 25).

The environmental burdens on the local natural environments in rural India, Nepal, and Pakistan (for instance) caused by, at least in part, the insufficient infrastructure for handling menstrual management. Problems range from the pollution of local water systems caused by disposal of sanitary waste to air pollution resulting from the burning of waste in an inappropriate and environmentally unsound manner. An intersectional analytical framework would help researchers to understand the various roles religion, caste, and class play in the outcomes of this issue. Any analysis which focuses solely on one factor, such as gender, as a significant mode of oppression (and cause of environmental injustices relating to menstrual hygiene and management) severely limits our understanding of the other multiple intersecting factors which influence menstrual hygiene and its impacts on the environment. One must be careful not to discuss a 'female perspective,' but instead attempt to critically engage with the particular and individual experiences of women or groups of women if one is to make substantial theoretical claims with practical import.

It is possible to overcome these environmental injustices, by taking an intersectional approach by seeking a holistic vision of society that explores the complex intersections that cause environmental injustices, such as the ones discussed in this paper. An effective, community-led, grassroots level project which takes into account the multiplicity of factors influencing the actions of players involved, will have a much higher chance of success than a non-intersectional and top-down approach. This is illustrated by Procter and Gamble, who have poured vast amounts of money (\$5 million dollars) into providing Western-style sanitary protection to girls living in the Global South in spite of low rates of success (Oster and Thornton 2010, 2). Questions have been raised over the suitability of modern, sanitary towels and tampons in communities which are tribal or rural and have little contact with the 'outside world' (WaterAid 2009, 2). Whereas

in Uttar Pradesh the local economy has been boosted by local workers who are involved in the production of ecologically-friendly sanitary pads (Tjon A Ten 2007, 7). As they are made of cloth and contain wood-ash, they can be broken down easily, which is essential in communities like those in Maharashtra if the sanitary waste is to be successfully composted in the dedicated wells contained in many of the latrines there.

Projects which attempt to resolve the issue of menstrual hygiene must be sensitive to local conditions, especially in relation to the environmental consequences of simply copying Western models of menstrual management. Projects must take into account the vastly different experiences and needs of women living in the rural Global South and cannot be based solely on gender but rather a multitude of other types of oppressions from caste to class. The SDGs of universal primary education, gender equality, and environmental sustainability will, at least in part, be decided by the capacity of political 'players' to understand and effectively implement the infrastructure necessary for women to properly see to their menstrual hygiene needs. These include access to functional toilets in schools, adequate sanitary protection, and the ability to dispose of waste materials in a safe and environmentally sustainable manner.

In India alone, there are still 128,000 schools which have no functional toilet and a further 61,000 have no running water (Gohain 2013). This global water and sanitation 'crisis' has the most impact upon women, who have been systematically excluded from the decision-making processes concerning both water and sanitation despite being the ones who have most to lose. These current inadequacies have vast implications on the ability of girls and women to take part in their daily activities when they are menstruating, with many girls being forced to stay at home from school during the course of their menses rather than risk bringing shame and embarrassment to their family (Oster and Thornton 2010, 25). Other problems do however materialize for girls who are 'allowed' to continue attending school during their menstruation, such as lack of access to toilets, running water, and sanitary protection, which in the long term could cause serious problems for their attendance and academic performance. Lack of such adequate facilities, particularly in rural Indian regions, means that women are not sufficiently able to attend to their biological needs and as such are often left at a severe disadvantage to their male counterparts.

The environmental consequences of insufficient facilities are vast, and studies completed in South Asia, India (Tjon A Ten 2007), Nepal

(WaterAid 2009), and Pakistan (Shah et al. 2013) have all shown that the popularity of tampons and sanitary pads soon fades when the novelty wears off and reality sets in. The reality in this case being, that there is simply no hygienic and environmentally sustainable method for the disposal of used products. With no garbage collection, the methods of disposal available are severely limited to burning, burying or throwing away the waste, leading to problems such as clogged toilets and the “pollution of the local environment...like the streams in villages” (WaterAid 2009, 19), which in turn makes it impossible to achieve MDG7 (environmental sustainability). All of which begs the question as to why, with no empirical backing, such vast sums of money are being poured into this particular arm of development?

Ecofeminist analysis which focuses only on gender as a significant mode of oppression severely limits our understanding of the other multiple intersecting factors which influence menstrual hygiene and its impacts on the environment. The prejudices women face on a daily basis in relation to their menstrual hygiene, often have more to do with factors such as class, religion, ethnicity, and caste than gender, yet non-intersectional research fails because it does not take these issues into account. An intersectional analytical framework helps researchers understand the various roles of religion, caste, and class (among other important factors) in the outcome of a wide range of issues which in this case affect women and the environment. In South Asia (particularly in Rural/Tribal Communities) for example, the social and cultural norms perpetuate the “myths and taboos which restrict women and girl’s participation in society” which are rooted in the idea that women are dirty, impure, or unclean (Bharadwaj and Patkar 2004, 1011)—taboos that are reinforced by religious practices (whether Hinduism, Islam, or Christianity<sup>7</sup>). A survey conducted in South Gujarat (Shah et al. 2013) found that restrictions placed on menstruating adolescent girls were largest in rural tribal regions of India where 89% of respondents claimed that they were restricted as to what they could touch, and just under 35% of girls were not even ‘allowed’ to leave the house alone (207). Oster and Thornton (2010) found that the majority of girls did not have access to a functional toilet at home and 66% of respondents stated that they had no choice but attend to their menstrual hygiene needs in an open field and often in the dark to avoid being seen (29).

Ecofeminist analysis which does not use intersectionality as a tool to engage with multiple points of oppression has on occasion been ignorant

of the factors of class and caste and as such has tended to “idealize movements that have Brahmin and middle-class heads and uses Dalits as the masses or victims” (Nalunnakkal cited by Kaijser and Kronsell 2014, 423). Such views ignore the capacity of rural, tribal and Dalit women to be active in political and environmental movements which seek to bring about the placement of infrastructure which will bring them greater freedoms. Discrimination is not merely about gender *or* race *or* class, but rather an intersection of these different social identities which lead to the generation of various locations of vulnerability. Intersectionality gives a voice to those marginalized in an already vulnerable subset, such as women (Kaijser and Kronsell 2014, 426) and in doing so makes intersectionality a valuable tool to ‘sensitize’ researchers to other areas in need of further critical thinking in India, the Global South, and the world as a whole.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Some ecofeminists have suggested that ecofeminism should change its name to better reflect this ‘new’ intersectional approach. Sherilyn MacGregor uses the term ‘feminist, ecological citizenship’ (2010) and Greta Gaard simply calls it the ‘new ecofeminism’ (2011). While I wholeheartedly agree with the sentiments contained within such new namesakes, I also find the move to rename the discipline completely unnecessary. Karen Warren was correct in comparing ecofeminism to the process of quilting in that its appearance is constantly evolving (2000, 67). While the borders of said quilt act as the boundaries of our discussion, the patches which provide the quilt with its ‘quilt-ness’ are created by the diversity of perspectives and multitude of opinions from a grass-roots level upwards. Ecofeminism is a continually evolving academic/activist tradition and one which it is impossible to completely define in a set of necessary and sufficient conditions. Ecofeminism and intersectionality are both theories in-progress and as such should not be viewed as a static method of theorizing, but rather one which continues to adapt according to the changing political and environmental landscape in which it finds itself.

Intersectionality represents a Kuhnian paradigm shift (1962) within ecofeminism and as such it should be treated with optimistic caution, especially since there is no guarantee of its future survival or success. It may have become fashionable to characterize one’s writing as intersectional, but this sometimes uncritical labelling can be more of a hindrance

than a help, allowing scholars, policy makers, and NGOs to pay lip service to inclusivity while simultaneously reinforcing the status quo. We must avoid this at all costs. In order to do this, we ought to be realistic about the potential of intersectionality and the methodological frameworks currently available. Intersectionality does not offer a complete and infallible solution to the issues of difference. However, it does offer a way to interrogate our assumptions and epistemological positioning before undertaking research, while also taking into account the mutually shaping nature of social categories, the multi-levelled structures of power, and their influence on identity and discrimination. Engaging with intersectionality can help to sensitize ourselves and others to the ways in which different forms of disadvantage can act as a method of silencing the most vulnerable and oppressed. Of course, there are plenty of important questions still left to be answered, but in the meantime, this should not prevent us from continuing along the path of intersectional ecofeminism or from adopting an intersectional approach in our personal and working lives.

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