



# Ecofeminism Revisited: Introduction to the Discourse

*Chhaya Datar*

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Most strands of feminism uphold, in varying degrees, the modernist dichotomy between nature and culture. Simone de Beauvoir, in her book *Second Sex*, points out that this distinction equates women with nature (characterized by their biological composition) and men with culture (characterized by their 'risk-taking' behavior). Liberal and Marxist feminists argue that the traditional notion of a connection between women and nature is a relic of patriarchy - an instrument of oppression - which should be allowed to wither away. For them, ecofeminism smacks of essentialism (biological determinism). Despite such criticism, one needs to acknowledge the fact that exploring ecofeminist arguments rising from a material base - social, historical, dialectical - creates support in favor of alternative development models as opposed to market-oriented capitalist models. In India, for example, poor women often find a potential for liberation within such models. Such an exploration also provides a better understanding of movements like India's Narmada Bachao Andolan social movement and opposition to India's Special Economic Zones, which show a strong emphasis on women, their concern for food security, and, as such, their vested interest in the preservation of ecological bases for the survival of their communities. Concepts such as 'decentralized communities,' 'subsistence production,' and others need to be understood against a theoretical background which justifies the need to start thinking about alternative development models. The book - based on research in India - is an introductory discourse of ecofeminism as a perspective from which to understand the world around us, where women's concerns of reproduction and subsistence are placed at the center stage of the human activities.

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