IJCRT.ORG ISSN : 2320-2882

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Ecofeminism and Indigenous Wisdom: A Comparative Study of Gandhian Women Environmentalists and Tribal Ecological Practices in India

[1]Ms.T.ABOORVA, [2]Dr.R.MANI,

[1]Full Time Research Scholar, [2]Professor & Head,

[1]Department of Gandhian Thought and Peace Science,

[1]The Gandhigram Rural Institute Deemed to be University, Dindigul, TN, IND

Abstract

This study compares ecofeminism and indigenous knowledge by assessing similarities between short accounts of Gandhian women environmentalists in India with indigenous ecological practices developed in situ. The work is premised on non-violence, care and connection - the epistemic and ethical principles of Gandhi's tradition. Vandana Shiva, Medha Patkar, Sugathakumari, and others embody a Gandhian vision of ecological justice. Similarly, indigenous tribal earth systems, particularly in Tamil Nadu, draw upon 'place- and people-based' traditional ecological knowledge systems which are linked to their spiritual, cultural and community life. The argument draws upon ecofeminist theory, Gandhian philosophy, and ethnography to assess how women in both organized environmental movements and tribe have been positioned as caretakers of earth. With comparative perspective we have suggested that there are similarities like care and respect for nature, community space and localized conservation, and opposition to exploitative development, as well as dissimilarity in practices and contextual issues. Finally, the article suggest an ecologically based environmental ethic that regards both grassroots activism and indigenous ecological knowledge as vibrant alternatives to environmentally destructive patriarchal and capitalist systems.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Indigenous Ecological Knowledge, Gandhian Environmentalism, Women Environmentalists

Introduction

The ecological crisis of the twenty-first century, marked by climate change, unbridled loss of biodiversity, and rampant environmental degradation, necessitates a qualitative rethinking of dominant development models. More and more, academics and activists are calling for a transition to alternative visions of nature, particularly those drawing on ecofeminist and indigenous paradigms. These critical frameworks, in turn, challenge dominant anthropocentric and patriarchal ones that instrumentalize nature as nothing more than a resource, promoting instead ethical visions of sustainability based on care, reciprocity, and community.

In the Indian situation, women have had a powerful and frequently revolutionary influence in shaping environmental movements resisting exploitative developmental models. Gandhian women environmentalists like Vandana Shiva, Medha Patkar, and Sugathakumari have become representative figures of anti-deforestation, anti-displacement, and anti-industrial agriculture campaigns on a consistent basis, championing norms of nonviolence, justice, and ecological balance. Concurrently, aboriginal tribal groups—most notably in states like Tamil Nadu—have protected traditional ecological knowledge by everyday actions: preserving forests, nurturing sacred groves, keeping indigenous seeds, and adopting sustainable harvesting. These practices, often spearheaded by tribal women, are rooted in strong cultural rituals, oral tradition, and spiritual appreciation of the natural world.

Even as Gandhian environmentalism and indigenous ecological knowledge are rooted in different social and cultural worlds, they find common ground in their mutual commitment to sustainability, local self-determination, and a moral connection between people and nature. This analysis attempts to look at both the intersections and divergences between these two perspectives, making a comparative study of their contribution. It seeks to clarify the ways in which Gandhian women environmentalists and tribal groups both express ecofeminist principles in their struggle against ecological exploitation and offer their practices as sustainable, culture-based models for living.

Through incorporating perspectives of ecofeminist theory, Gandhian philosophy, and indigenous knowledge systems, this research makes a contribution to continuing debate in the areas of environmental ethics and gender. It argues that both activist and ancestral modes of ecological knowing—whether conveyed through formal social movements or lived tribal culture—must be valued as essential assets for remaking a more equitable and ecologically harmonious future.

The Mullu Kuruma, Paniya, Kattunaicken, and Cholanaikkan of Kerala exhibit a profound knowledge of local biodiversity, ecological processes, and sustainable lifestyles. Their practices of seed saving, intercropping, responsible honey harvesting, and forest ceremonies are great lessons of sustainability to counter mainstream development conceptions.

The gender dimension of ecological understanding is important. Women tend to be caretakers of seed banks, medicinal plants, and holy ecological places. This is a form of lived ecofeminism akin to work by Gandhian environmental activists such as Mayilamma and C.K. Janu. Tribal ecological practices in Kerala also offer an essential space for examining the intersections of environmental justice, Indigenous rights, and gender justice.

This article employs recent ethnographic and scientific research to document and critically analyze the ecological practices of Kerala's tribal peoples. It situates their knowledge systems within broader debates on sustainability, post-development, and ecofeminism. The article contends that these practices are critical in imagining equitable and resilient ecological futures.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three interlinked streams of theory ecofeminist theory, Gandhian environmental ethics, and indigenous ecological knowledge systems that together provide an integrated framework to analyze the ecological contributions of Gandhian women environmentalists and Indian tribal peoples. These frameworks highlight how women, both in modern environmental movements and in pre-modern tribal societies, are agents of ecological care, resistance, and sustainability.

Ecofeminist theory provides a theoretical framework for the gender dimensions of environmentalism. Ecofeminism deals with the complementarity of nature exploitation and women's oppression within patriarchal and capitalist structures (**Mies & Shiva, 1993).** Ecofeminism critiques dualisms such as man/woman and culture/nature that have worked to marginalize women and nature (**Merchant, 1980**). **Vandana Shiva (1988**), Indian ecofeminist thinker, argues that the systems of women's knowledge,

especially in agriculture, seed banking, and water management, rely on biodiversity, sustainability, and nonviolence. "Earth Democracy" is her conception of an ecological worldview that prioritizes diversity, interdependence, and justice **(Shiva, 2005**). Ecofeminist theory thus enables the analysis of Gandhian women environmentalists such as Shiva, Medha Patkar, and Sugathakumari as ecological actors fighting environmental degradation in the politics of caring ethics and activist politics of belonging.

Gandhian environmental ethics is the second theoretical strand. Gandhi's philosophy of ahimsa (nonviolence), swaraj (self-rule), sarvodaya (general well-being), and trusteeship of natural resources form a moral basis for ecological management. Gandhi was against exploitative industrialism and promoted simple, decentralized, and autonomous living in harmony with nature (**Guha, 2000**). He famously claimed that "the Earth provides enough to satisfy everyone's need, but not everyone's greed" **(Gandhi, as quoted in Shiva, 1988, p. xvi**). Gandhian principles speak strongly in the women's activism of such figures as Medha Patkar, who mobilized the Narmada Bachao Andolan using nonviolent resistance, and Sugathakumari, who wed ecological spirituality to grassroots mobilization during the Silent Valley Movement. Gandhian environmental ethics thus offer a political and moral explanation for such women's nonviolent ecological activism.

The third theoretical framework is indigenous ecological knowledge systems, those of the tribal people in India. Indigenous knowledge is integrated into their holistic and oral form, and very much part of the cultural, religious, and day-to-day life of tribal societies. It encompasses practices such as forest conservation, sacred groves, seed conservation, and community-based biodiversity management (**UNESCO, 2017**). Females of the Tamil Nadu tribes, such as the Irular, Paliyar, and Malai Vedan, contribute remarkably to ecological health through seed saving, plant-based medicines, and sustainable harvest management. Nature is regarded by these tribes as kin not resource, and their ecological wisdom is guided by principles of reciprocity, religious reverence, and shared management (**Kikon, 2019; Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2021**). Unlike the formal activism of Gandhian women, tribal ecological practices are embedded in everyday life and passed through generations as cultural heritage.

All three paradigms—ecofeminism, Gandhian ethics, and indigenous ecological knowledge—collectively provide comparative and nonsectoral understanding of women's activity in environmental protection. Whereas Gandhian women environmentalists engage in systematic activism based on political ideology, tribal women express ecological consciousness in the form of lived traditions. A combination of both ecological efforts offers viable alternatives to standard paradigms of development rooted in capitalist exploitation and ecological destruction. This integrated theoretical framework supports the article's aim to bring to the centre the ethical, cultural, and gendered elements of environmentalism in India.

Gandhian Women Environmentalists: Voices of Ecofeminism

The Gandhian women-led environmental movements in India display an intimate alignment of Gandhian values with ecofeminist values. These women, inspired by the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi on ahimsa (nonviolence), swaraj (self-governance), and sarvodaya (welfare for all), have been at the forefront of revolutionary roles of resisting environmental destruction with a focus on gender, justice, and care. Their political activism is ethical and spiritual as well, grounded in values with which the ecofeminist critique of patriarchal and industrial exploitation of nature and women resonates **(Mies & Shiva, 1993; Shiva, 1988**).

- **Vandana Shiva: Biodiversity and Seed Sovereignty**

Dr. Vandana Shiva is one of the most well-known practitioners of the union of ecofeminism and Gandhian environmentalism. Educated as a physicist, Shiva turned to ecological activism in the late 1970s. She established Navdanya, a movement to defend seed sovereignty, organic farming, and biodiversity against the Green Revolution and agricultural corporatization in India. Shiva criticizes industrial agriculture as "a war against the Earth" and promotes Earth Democracy a philosophy based on diversity, sustainability, and justice **(Shiva, 2005).** Her activism focuses on the central role of women as keepers of indigenous

ecological knowledge. **Shiva (1988)** asserts that "women's work and knowledge is central to biodiversity conservation and ecological sustainability." She contends that loss of biodiversity is connected not just with ecological degradation, but with disempowerment of women's knowledge systems as well. Shiva's vision resonates with both Gandhian and ecofeminist ethics, focusing on nonviolence, autonomy, and living in harmony with nature.

- **Medha Patkar: Resistance to Developmental Displacement**

Medha Patkar, the founder of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), is another powerful Gandhian woman environmentalist whose activism echoes ecofeminist principles. Patkar has conducted a nonviolent battle against the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada River since the 1980s, which planned to dislocate thousands of tribal and rural people. Her campaign used satyagraha and mass mobilization to make people aware of the human and ecological costs of big development projects (**Dwivedi, 1998**).

Patkar's activism is focused on the interconnection of environmental justice, human rights, and empowering marginalized groups—particularly women. According to **Shiva (2005),** these movements "redefine development" by challenging top-down, technocratic approaches and recuperating community rights to natural resources. Patkar personifies Gandhian resistance through nonviolent protest, hunger strike, and collective resistance and places local women at the forefront of environmental struggle.

- **Sugathakumari: Eco-spirituality and Silent Valley**

Poetry and activism by Sugathakumari were at the heart of the Silent Valley Movement in Kerala, India, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This movement was successful in preventing the building of a hydroelectric dam in one of India's remaining tropical rainforests—a region that is highly biodiverse and culturally significant. The environmental activism of Sugathakumari was spiritual and cultural in nature and based on a Gandhian cosmology in which nature was divine and in need of protection (**Guha, 2000**).

Her poem Marathinu Sthuti (Ode to a Tree) became an anthem of the movement, symbolizing the voice of nature and the need to protect it. Sugathakumari's activism illustrates the emotional, poetic, and ethical dimensions of environmentalism that are often neglected in policy discourse. As an ecofeminist voice, she framed the forest not merely as an ecological space but as a spiritual companion, and she upheld Gandhian nonviolence in both speech and action (**Rajendran, 2020**).

Tribal Ecological Practices: The Wisdom of Indigenous Communities in Kerala

Tribal ecological practices in Kerala show a unique mix of environmental values, indigenous beliefs, and practical sustainability. Communities like the Kattunaicken, Mullu Kuruma, Paniya, Cholanaikkan, Kurichya, and Irula have developed intricate systems for managing resources, producing food, and interacting with forests. These systems are both ecologically sound and culturally significant (**Aneesh et al., 2022; Berkes, 2012**). These tribes do not see nature as something to be exploited but as a sacred part of life. Every element—from soil microbes to sacred groves—holds spiritual importance.

The forest ecosystems of Kerala's Western Ghats, known as one of the world's eight "hottest hotspots" of biodiversity, have thrived in part because of these tribal communities. Their knowledge is context-sensitive, based on experience, and passed down orally (**Chandran & Hughes, 2000)**. Their practices are often shaped by seasonal changes, local beliefs, and rituals, creating a sustainable way to live alongside nature.

In tribal cosmology, land, water, animals, and plants are family, not resources to be taken from. This belief encourages restraint, giving back, and renewal; these values are often absent from mainstream development models (**Rai et al., 2019**). Traditional practices like shifting cultivation, conserving sacred groves,

maintaining community seed banks, and using ethnomedicinal healing reflect a relational approach to the environment, where identity and ecology are deeply connected.

The role of tribal women in caring for the environment is significant. Women serve as seed keepers, holders of medicinal knowledge, and ritual leaders, representing what scholars call ecofeminist traditions (**Viju, 2025**). Their work supports Gandhian values of self-reliance, localized decision-making, and nonviolence toward nature, presenting an alternative to industrial farming and monoculture.

Despite the richness of these practices, modern policies often ignore or push aside tribal ecological wisdom. Displacement from development, deforestation, and the loss of traditional rights have disrupted these knowledge systems. However, in light of ecological crises, Indigenous ecological knowledge (IEK) is being recognized around the world as an important factor in climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, and ethical sustainability (**Sreelakshmi et al., 2023).**

Therefore, studying the ecological wisdom of Kerala's tribal communities is not just about preserving culture; it is also a crucial step toward creating sustainable futures based on coexistence, care, and stewardship.

- **Ethical Forest Engagement and Non-Timber Products**

The Kattunaicken community practices ethical honey collection, using rituals and selective harvesting methods that protect bees and forest health. This process is deeply spiritual, emphasizing reciprocity and care. Such practices reflect a metaphysical relationship with nature rather than exploitative use.

The tribal communities of Kerala have forest engagement practices based on a spiritual and ethical relationship with nature. These communities do not consider the exploitation of forest resources for profit, but engage with forests through mutual respect, sustainability, and awe for nature. This cosmology applies, in particular, to the way they exploit Non-Timber Forest Products or NTFPs: honey, resin, wild fruits, medicinal herbs, bamboo, mushrooms, etc., which serve as food, medicine, and sources of income for these communities.

For example, honey-gatherers in the Nilambur and Wayanad regions, the Kattunaicken tribe, follow a highly selective method of honey collection that is, at once, sustainable in allowing the colonies to thrive, and spiritually sound, as harvesting is preceded by prayers. A share of the harvest often is invariably left uncollected, reserved for the spirits of the forest or for future foragers (**Anitha & Bhat, 2002).** Such practices ensure restraint in harvesting as opposed to commercial extraction methods, which lay waste on hives and their bee population.

Even the collection of herbs, leaves, and tubers by Mullu Kuruma and Kurichya of Wayanad occurs only at specified seasons according to lunar cycles and local ecological calendars. Such a seasonal rhythm ensures respect for plant regeneration cycles and long-term availability (**Sreelakshmi et al., 2023**). Sacred groves (traditionally called kavus or sarpakavu) are also not permitted for resource extraction, except during some rituals, thereby emphasizing the sanctity of biodiversity zones.

Collecting NTFPs is not merely a subsistence activity but a community-managed enterprise. They collect forest produce in groups, and decisions are made in traditional assemblies, or ooru-kootam, which often allocate tasks and ensure enforcement of conservation rules. Many times, women take on leadership responsibilities in monitoring the sustainable use of medicinal plants/herbs (**George & Bhaskaran, 2019**). These practices manifest gendered environmental ethics where caring, observation, and ecological knowledge are intricately intertwined.

In addition, indigenous peoples preserve elaborate folk taxonomies of forest products, often identifying species not merely by their utility but by habitat, seasonality, taste, and spiritual importance. In this regard, over 200 economically important plant species are reported by the tribes of Wayanad alone **(Anil Kumar et al., 2015**). The transmission of this knowledge is oral and practical, and it faces the threat of erosion due to formal schooling, migration, and deforestation.

Commercial forestry and state policies have disrupted traditional access to forests. The acknowledgment of tribal governance through community forest rights under the **Forest Rights Act (2006)** has been an important legal avenue in recognizing tribal stewardship. Where there have been successful applications, these community rights have revitalized sustainable collection of NTFP and local governance systems.

Thus, the very foundations of NTFP collection by Kerala's tribal communities are etched in the high principles of ethics, community values, and deep spiritual reverence for nature, and are, therefore, not market-driven. These practices represent live models of biocultural conservation, closely adhering to Gandhian values of minimalism, decentralization, and ecological accountability.

- **Traditional Agriculture and Seed Sovereignty**

The Keralan tribes maintain agroecological systems, which are grounded in their cultural-ecological landscape. Their traditional agriculture is diverse, with low external inputs and high resilience to climatic variations; it thus offers an alternative to industrial monocultures and promotes seed sovereignty as the pillar of food security and cultural identity.

To the tribes that exist in Kerala, namely the Irulas, Muthuvans, Malayarayans, and Kurichyas, agriculture is one connecting them to the soil, the spirits of their ancestors, and the seasonal rhythms of nature (**Chandran & Gadgil, 1998**). Shifting cultivation (also called punam krishi or podu), terrace agriculture, and mixed cropping systems are those practiced by these communities. Crops such as finger millet (ragi), pearl millet (bajra), little millet (samai), pigeon pea, tubers, leafy vegetables, and traditional rice varieties are all grown together to reduce the risk of crop failure and increase dietary diversity.

The Mullu Kuruma tribe in Wayanad is famous for conserving rare landraces of rice and millets like Chennellu and Navara, negating drought and pest attacks (**Anil Kumar et al., 2015**). The age-old varieties are usually cultivated with no synthetic chemicals but with the use of leaf compost, cow dung, and green manure, thus acting in every substance consistent with organic regenerative agriculture long before these terms were ever applied in an academic sense.

The central principle of tribal agriculture is seed sovereignty: the right of communities to save, exchange, and breed their own seeds, in which women play a crucial role by maintaining the seed bank in earthen pots and woven baskets and deciding upon the time and mode of sowing seeds (**Vijayalakshmi, 2017**). Seed saving transcends a purely material practice; the work also embodies spiritual connections with ideas of fertility, continuity, and ancestral obligation.

Dissemination of agricultural knowledge and establishment of collective ownership of seed varieties in lieu of commercial seed patents and genetically modified seed varieties are celebrated through seed festivals (beej utsav) and community rituals. Knowledge on nurturing biodiversity intergenerationally is then imparted through songs and oral tradition via labor.

However, in spite of the good ecological practices carried out by them, traditional systems are being pushed out of their very existence and under severe pressure through land alienation and market demands, and government policies promoting cultivation of cash crops. Hybrid seeds promoted under corporate and state-aided partnerships have further eroded genetic diversity and enforced dependency on external inputs. Many NGOs and tribal cooperatives are working in Kerala to revive traditional seeds and impart agro-ecological literacy to tribal youth (**Menon & Kumar, 2020).**

These indigenous models of food production not only offer climate-resilient solutions but also oppose the dominant paradigm of industrial agriculture. They espouse Gandhian values of self-reliance (swadeshi), non-violence (ahimsa) towards nature, and community-oriented rural development.

Challenges and Threats

Despite their singular contributions to ecological preservation, Gandhian women environmentalists and indigenous tribal communities continue to face a range of structural and emerging challenges, including threats to their activism, livelihoods, and ecological knowledge systems. The multifaceted nature of these challenges hinges on state policies, corporate interests, climate change, and socio-cultural marginalization.

- **Displacement and developmental violence**

Among the longest-standing threats to both indigenous ecological and ecofeminist resistance are large-scale development schemes, including dams, mining, highways, and industrial corridors. They tend to produce forced displacement, ecological damage, and cultural disintegration. Tribal people are disproportionately impacted, whose livelihoods and identities are inextricably linked to land and forest environments (**Fernandes, 2007**). Medha Patkar led the Narmada Bachao Andolan, which consistently pointed out how the state places economic growth above human rights and ecological justice (**Dwivedi, 1998**). Such "development-induced displacement" leads not only to the physical displacement of individuals but also to the loss of their ecological and cultural heritage.

- **Marginalization of Women's Ecological Knowledge**

Tribal women and Gandhian women environmentalists have, in fact, highlighted the primacy of women's knowledge for maintaining biodiversity and food systems. Dominant agricultural and development models still exclude this knowledge. For instance, the diffusion of genetically modified crops, monoculture, and chemical inputs in agriculture undercuts traditional seed systems that women such as Vandana Shiva have struggled to defend (**Shiva, 2005**). As industrial agriculture grows, women's work is made ever more invisible or unacknowledged in official institutions and policy-making forums (**Agarwal, 1992**).

- **Legal and Policy Challenges**

While India has passed legislations such as the Forest Rights Act (**2006**) to acknowledge tribal and forest dwellers' rights, the processes of implementation are weak and contentious. Evictions, delayed recognition of community forest rights, and clashes with conservation policies (e.g., proclaiming Protected Areas) remain to disenfranchise tribal communities (**Kumar & Kerr, 2012**). Likewise, environmental protectors such as Medha Patkar and others have been subjected to legal intimidation, monitoring, and mobility restrictions under the pretext of national security or development needs (**Front Line Defenders, 2023**).

- **Climate Change and Ecological Stress**

Climate change is an increasing existential threat to both Gandhian and tribal communities' ecologically secured systems. Unpredictable monsoons, a rise in temperature, forest degradation, and water shortages disproportionately impact agrarian and forest-dependent communities. Tribal women, who bear the responsibility of fetching water, firewood, and forest products, suffer more from the depletion of resources (**UN Women, 2022**). In addition, commons like rivers and forests' degradation constrain local ecological economies' resilience.

- **Generational and Cultural Degradation**

The sharing of indigenous ecological knowledge is also at risk because of modernization, migration, and intergenerational discontinuity. Tribal youth are further removed from their original practices because of

formal school systems that disregard local languages and knowledge (**Kikon, 2019**). Likewise, the moral and philosophical underpinnings of Gandhian environmentalism become increasingly seem remote in an accelerating consumer society. Mainstream environmental thought usually ignores the ethical, spiritual, and nonviolent origins of Gandhian activism, restricting its appeal to young people.

Comparative Analysis

- **Philosophical Foundations**

Ecofeminism and Indigenous Ecological Wisdom are both situated in a worldview which offers a radical challenge to the dominant anthropocentric and patriarchal paradigms of development.

Ecofeminism, as manifested through Gandhian women environmentalists such as Vandana Shiva, Medha Patkar, and Mayilamma, is founded upon ahimsa (non-violence), swadeshi (self-reliance) and sarvodaya (welfare of all). These values have formed the ethical foundation for their critique of ecological destruction and gender-based discrimination. Ecofeminism understands the domination of nature and women as interconnected processes that emerge from patriarchal capitalistic origins (**Shiva, 1988).**

Indigenous ecological philosophy is related closely to animistic and relational worldview (for instance, the tribal communities of Kerala such as Kattunaickens, Kurichiyans, and Mullu Kuruma). Thus, nature as an entity is not divorced from other beings, but is metaphorically defined as a living entity embedded spiritually and culturally. Forests, rivers, and animals make kin, and their tenders honor moral duty. Rituals, oral traditions, and cosmologies are their vehicles of environmental ethics **(Balasubramanian & Ravichandran, 2022**).

However, ecofeminism generally finds its articulation in activism and writing. Instead, tribal wisdom is expressed in lived practice and community tradition. Both, however, have in common the commitment to maintaining ecological balance and respecting life, and in collective well-being, although rooted in different epistemologies.

Women maintain an important position in ecofeminism and tribal ecological traditions; they are considered crucial agents in environmental conservation, knowledge transmission, and resistance.

- **In Ecofeminist Activism:**

Women like Mayilamma in Plachimada became the face of grassroots environmental movements against corporate exploitation. The struggle against Coca-Cola's extraction of groundwater shows how women often protect local ecosystems through activism and moral authority (**Vijay, 2006**).

Shiva's work emphasizes women's connections to biodiversity, especially in seed saving and food sovereignty. She states that women are the primary conservers of traditional knowledge systems based on their close interactions with land and water (**Shiva, 1988).**

- **In Indigenous Communities:**

Amongst tribal women in Kerala, ecological knowledge is passed down through the generations with regard to everyday practices—seed selection, wild food gathering, herbal medicine, and maintenance of sacred groves (kavu). For example, Kurichiyan women have household seed banks whereby seeds are chosen based on ecological suitability and community needs (**Thomas & Mathew, 2024).**

Women are ritual leaders and mediators in land-use decisions, safeguarding sacred spaces. Their unwritten environmental ethics speak to a deep awareness of seasonal rhythms, biodiversity patterns, and methods of sustainable harvesting **(Rajendran et al., 2023**).

Criteria	**Tribal Women in Kerala**	**Gandhian Women Environmentalists**
Philosophical foundation	Nature worship, kinship with nature, oral traditions	Gandhian ethics, nonviolence, neoliberalism
Representation	Daily practices, rituals, oral teaching	Activism, writings, judicial intervention
Involvement	Communal participation, informal leadership	Visible leadership, vocal environmental representation
Indigenous wisdom	Lived ecological knowledge	Governance-based ecological analysis
Function in ecological balance	Forest-based subsistence, ecological self-sufficiency	Environmental heritage protection, indigenous seed protection, influence on environmental policy.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of ecofeminism and Indigenous ecological wisdom in Kerala reveals a profound convergence of values rooted in care ethics, sustainability, and community resilience. Both Gandhian women environmentalists and tribal women leaders exemplify how gendered knowledge systems serve as powerful agents of environmental stewardship. With activists such as Mayilamma, C.K. Janu, and Vandana Shiva working in the Gandhian tradition of non-violence, self-reliance, and decentralized ecology, the tribal communities in Kerala live these principles through their traditions, rituals, and forest-based livelihoods.

Ecological practices regarding seed-keeping, sacred grove preservation, and non-timber forestry management pursued by Kerala tribal communities are a testimony of human survival and ethical relationship with the Earth opposing the existent development paradigm while proposing alternative models of regeneration, spiritual ecology, and communal harmony.

At the same time, Gandhian ecofeminists have turned localized environmental issues into national and global discourses on eco-justice and sustainable futures; their work represents a politics of resistance that complements the ethics of ecology of the tribes, especially with respect to issues regarding corporate exploitation, the defense of natural resources, and an emphasis on the local over the global.

These two paradigms converge on a gender-inclusive perspective regarding ecological degradation. Recognizing Indigenous women's wisdom side by side with the work of Gandhian ecofeminists increases the possibility for environmental governance in India. It calls on scholars, policymakers, and activists to center subaltern voices, integrate traditional ecological knowledge, and reclaim ecofeminist visions of harmony between nature and society.

References

1. Guha, R. (2000). *Environmentalism: A global history*. Longman.
2. Kikon, D. (2019). *Living with oil and coal: Resource politics and militarization in Northeast India*. University of Washington Press.
3. Merchant, C. (1980). *The death of nature: Women, ecology and the scientific revolution*. Harper & Row.
4. Mies, M., & Shiva, V. (1993). *Ecofeminism*. Zed Books.
5. Ministry of Tribal Affairs. (2021). *Statistical profile of scheduled tribes in India*. Government of India. https://tribal.nic.in
6. Shiva, V. (1988). *Staying alive: Women, ecology and development*. Zed Books.
7. Shiva, V. (2005). *Earth democracy: Justice, sustainability, and peace*. South End Press.
8. UNESCO. (2017). *Indigenous and local knowledge systems (LINKS)*. https://en.unesco.org/links
9. Dwivedi, R. (1998). *Resisting dams and "modernity" in the Narmada Valley*. *Social Scientist*, 26(3), 4–33.
10. Guha, R. (2000). *Environmentalism: A global history*. Longman.
11. Mies, M., & Shiva, V. (1993). *Ecofeminism*. Zed Books.
12. Rajendran, L. (2020). Women and ecological activism in India: The case of Sugathakumari and the Silent Valley Movement. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 27(1), 36–54.
13. Shiva, V. (1988). *Staying alive: Women, ecology and development*. Zed Books.
14. Shiva, V. (2005). *Earth democracy: Justice, sustainability, and peace*. South End Press.
15. Agarwal, B. (1992). The gender and environment debate: Lessons from India. *Feminist Studies, 18*(1), 119–158. https://doi.org/10.2307/3178217
16. Dwivedi, R. (1998). Resisting dams and "modernity" in the Narmada Valley. *Social Scientist, 26*(3), 4–33.
17. Fernandes, W. (2007). India's forced displacement policy and practice: Is compensation up to its functions? In H. Mathur (Ed.), *India: Social development report 2008* (pp. 106–117). Oxford University Press.
18. Front Line Defenders. (2023). *Global analysis 2023: Environmental human rights defenders in India*. https://www.frontlinedefenders.org
19. Kikon, D. (2019). *Living with oil and coal: Resource politics and militarization in Northeast India*. University of Washington Press.
20. Kumar, K., & Kerr, J. (2012). Democratic assertions: The making of India's recognition of forest rights. *Development and Change, 43*(3), 751–771. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2012.01776.x
21. Shiva, V. (2005). *Earth democracy: Justice, sustainability, and peace*. South End Press.
22. UN Women. (2022). *Gender equality in climate action: Women at the forefront of change*. https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/climate-change
23. Balasubramanian, P., & Ravichandran, R. (2022). Tribal ecological traditions and forest ethics in the Western Ghats. Journal of Environmental Studies, 18(2), 113–129.
24. Rajendran, M., Thomas, L., & Devika, N. (2023). Sacred forests and biodiversity: A study among the Kattunaicken and Paniya tribes. Journal of Tribal Research, 44(1), 22–41.
25. Shiva, V. (1988). Staying alive: Women, ecology and development. Kali for Women.
26. Thomas, L., & Mathew, J. (2024). Seed sovereignty and women in tribal Wayanad. International Journal of Indigenous Studies, 12(3), 89–104.
27. Vijay, S. (2006). The water struggle at Plachimada. Economic and Political Weekly, 41(8), 661–662.