Title: The Wisdom of Hugging: Understanding Care through Femininity

Abstract

The concepts of care have been labelled as feminine in the mainstream knowledge discourse, implying that care is a gender-based quality belonging to women. From this premise, women and men have been assigned distinct gender roles that feed into the debate on equality issues as women globally lead in the professions of care. However, most ancient philosophies and wisdoms of Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Ancient African philosophy, and Ancient Mayanism understood care as an operational aspect of femininity, which is beyond the physical division of women and men that lie within a non-gendered based ideology. This article positions Care as a quality that can be communicated and mastered much like a language. Care is a quality based on an attitude expressed through actions that can be understood across different communities, religions, and cultures. By examining the concept of Chipko from India, this article challenges the mainstream development ideology that depicts girls and women from rural, marginalised, and indigenous communities as vulnerable. In challenging these misconceptions, women and girls that operationalise care have a deep understanding of oneness belonging to traditional knowledge systems. Thereby, this concept of oneness is a defining principle of empowerment which contests the presumption of a deficit of knowledge and empowerment directed at women and girls from an uneven development context. In this critical examination of care through the Chipko concept, the arrogance of Western mainstream education reflects systems that have prioritised efficiency over care, and othering over oneness. Drawing from my PhD research and reflective account of the authors' journey to empowerment, this article sets out the importance of learning from the women and girls that operationalise care, particularly as the future targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030 looks unobtainable.

Keywords: Chipko movement, Care, Women, Feminine Principles, Development.

Introduction

The Hindi word *Chipko* means 'to hug' or 'cling to', which in this context refers to the hugging or embracing of trees (Rodriguez Stimson, 2015). The colonial projects that degraded forests in rural India for non-local and industrial commercial needs roused the non-violent, non-cooperative resistance against large-scale felling (Shiva and Bandyopadhyay, 1986). The Chipko concept, operationalised as a non-violent ecological movement, was driven by women and communities. The Chipko movement spread throughout India in the 1970s to protect the demands of the capitalist production system that threatened the marginalised majority in India as women began to protest by hugging trees. This simple act of hugging has impacted global environmental movements through the years, like in Germany, as environmental protestors set up camps to protect Hambach Forest from the ravages of coal mining (Joshi, 2017; Saner, 2011). Despite the fact that environmental movements in Europe are not exactly replicating the Chipko model, the philosophical underpinnings of the Chipko concept have infused these global demonstrations with a deeper understanding of oneness with nature, becoming a rallying point to environmental movements in Switzerland, Germany and Holland (Shiva and Bandyopadhyay, 1986). The hugging of trees is an action historically associated with the Bishnoi community in Rajasthan, India, led by Amrita Devi more than 300 years ago, where she clung to the sacred *Khejri* (Ghaf) tree in protest. More than 300 members of the Bishnoi community sacrificed their lives; their actions gave birth to the Chipko concept and subsequent movements (Shiva, 1999, p. 66). The provoking nature of this non-violent environmental movement perhaps lies in its unassuming methodology, to hug. This action depicts a rendering off, the submission to nature.

However, the modern Western development discourse and its mainstream approach to the climate crisis are at odds with what Chipko embodies. The exclusion of the fundamental intelligence of oneness sets the basis for ignorance and arrogance by a system that claims human development is in the Anthropocene epoch – human at the centre of the world (UNDP, 2020). This modern view that people are the saviours of the planet is interlinked to colonial thinking that led the 'civilised' to conquer, convert, and oppress the 'barbaric', with the pretence that they were saving the rest of humanity from paganism and ignorance ordained by God (Rodney, 1972). In this perverse power imbalance, there are similar connotations with the interpretation of the biblical story of Adam and Eve. God's instruction for the [hu]man dominion over nature sets out the basis for a hierarchical structure where similar to our current Anthropocene epoch, there is an absence of oneness, and the external nature is no longer recognised as part of our shared humanity (Genesis 1: 26). Therefore, from this biblical perspective, a division occurs, and in turn, this separatist ideology further divides us as we understand our humanity as an independent, individualistic phenomenon that ends with us

(Ryser, 1997). Within this notion of saving, comes the darker aspect of charity, a concept that, for it to exist, needs to position one above others. Instead, mutual aid, or oneness, and the ancient African philosophy of *Ubuntu*, is based on being human through others without hierarchical power imbalances, which can be further understood as a shared humanity (Khomba, 2011; Zulu, 2018; Ngomane, 2019). As a result of this separatist ideology, the 'othering', the judgement that proliferates our modern society emerges, distinguishing the educated from the uneducated, the skilled from the unskilled and the empowered from the disempowered, forming the foundation of a market-needs economy that gives an acceptable status within modern society (Illich, 1970, 1973, 1978; Illich et al., 1977; Brown and Samuel, 2013). The colonial root of the mainstream market economy founded on dominion, exploitation and extraction continues to wrap around rural and marginalised communities, spreading like wildfire through development agendas that seek to implement a western metric that disregards indigenous knowledge and ways of being (Kleinman, 1995; Shiva, 1999).

Capitalism sees nature as a resource that needs to be exploited and independent from our nature. Smith (1984, p. 7) argues that "it is capitalism which ardently defies the inherited separation of nature and society, and with pride rather than shame" therefore, without separation that equates to discrimination, poverty and racism, the capitalist system cannot continue. Despite the good intentions that circulate current climate crisis efforts, those principles of separation still exist. Climate activists advocate for leaders to take responsibility, whilst leaders blame other states and so forth, with neither party taking responsibility (Hassan, 2021). Unlike the women from the Chipko movement who understood their lives depended on the forest's survival, modern western society believes that the planet needs saving, maintaining that position of dominion and separation, which is based on the same colonial approach to divide and rule (Shiva, 1999). By adopting this problematic world view, the notion that we are separated from nature is maintained. Therefore, the colonial worldview sees nature as a resource, implying we can survive without nature and negating that we are nature ourselves (Smith, 1984). This dichotomous position creates a confused human-nature relationship that is opposite to the value systems and experiences of most women in the Global South who see humans as part of nature, which facilitates care.

Reflecting on my own PhD research, this article first points out the absence of care in modern society and the imbalance in governance which seeps into the education system. I illustrate, the emphasis on efficiency and othering rather than care and oneness, has a negative impact on our wellbeing, and it further disables the modern educated person from empowerment. This disablement through

mainstream education happens when the hierarchical structures dictate the curriculum. In this rigidity of learning, intellectual freedom is compromised. Creativity, exploration, and curiosity are largely substituted for a repetitious, memorising approach to learning that limits the independence of mind, that alone is the basis of genuine education (Baldwin, 1961). Furthermore, in an examination of a disruptive femininity, this article positions women and girls from marginalised and rural backgrounds as empowered, challenging the normative discourses of vulnerability. This article aims to examine the strength and courage that lies at the heart of the oneness practised by women in the Chipko movement, and how our humanity can be salvaged through the type of care embodied by these women.

Background

The methodological framework of my PhD has influenced my critical examination of care within this article. The framework weaves in a range of methodologies, methods, and theories, such as digital and auto Ethnography, Indigenous methodology, Critical methods, Phenomenology, Grounded theory, Feminist theory, Critical Buddhist theory and various other theories from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, breaking from the strict confines of Western scientific protocol. The relevance to this methodological framework is the intellectual freedom given to understand empowerment from the ontological and epistemological perspectives of 'women' themselves. The empowerment of the indigenous women challenges the normative paradigms of vulnerability. Furthermore, this article draws on the scoping review conducted in my PhD, which examined mainstream pedagogical approaches that facilitate the empowerment of women and girls from an uneven development context. The findings of this scoping review showed that traditional knowledge systems had been excluded from the design of mainstream pedagogy. This supports the premise of this article that the women spearheading the Chipko movement operationalise wisdom and knowledge that is largely overlooked by mainstream education. This article argues that Chipko as a movement suggests an ecological protest but leaves behind the critical examination of Chipko as a concept and an example of the operationalisation of these traditional knowledge systems; thus, this article has emerged from my PhD.

Storytelling is entrenched throughout my PhDs research design that adopts a qualitative three-stage process. The first of the stages is an autoethnographic account written as a family biography that offers a voice to the personal journey of seeking empowerment by examining the lives of my mother, my grandmother and myself and the different experiences coming from Colombia and the UK. Schooling rarely provides reflective spaces for the development of critical consciousness that explores

the ‘Who am I really?’, a central question that allows the learner to create alternative futures (Rodney, 1972). In critically examining mainstream education and whether it facilitated the empowerment of my grandmother and mother, it became apparent that formal education was not designed to empower women, particularly women from non-Western marginalised societies. The education that they received through informal and non-formal avenues allowed them to cope with the vulnerable settings that enshrouded so much of their lives, like poverty, oppression, and discrimination. Thus, the examples of resistance, perseverance and determination that had also helped me, as a refugee child, were not learnt in formal schooling but from the same women, I judged as different from me. In examining our formal mainstream education system, what stands out poignantly is that its main drive is the external consumption of knowledge (Illich, 1970). In that process of self-reflection, a commonality emerged between the women folk from the Chipko movement and that of my grandmother and mother due to a shared understanding that everything is interconnected (Shiva, 1999). From an Ancient African lens, this emerging commonality is the existential link to a ‘shared humanity’ where my separatist identity is dissolved, and being human is intrinsic to others and to nature (Zulul, 2018). Drawing from the autoethnographic account of my PhD, as I examined the stories of my grandmother and mother, I began to peel back the layers that masked our commonality as women. Despite the vulnerable settings that plagued much of their lives, at heart are women that dealt with their circumstances as best they could in a joyful manner, and in that, lay their agency to persevere and continue. These very examples of care were palpable throughout their life stories. What was rooted in their empowerment was a decision and capacity to deal with the pain and uncertainty that is life through the realisation of their inner empowerment (Jayawickrama, 2018; Lindekens and Jayawickrama, 2019; Kleinman, 2020). The ability to learn from the empowerment of women from marginalised and rural backgrounds requires a self-reflective process in which the differences between experiences are cast aside, regardless of political, social, environmental, cultural, and economic settings that separate people externally. In this approach, one must move from an individualist stance to a collective one where our shared humanity is expanded beyond what we identify with (Sadhguru, 2021).

The political fictions of the self-made person, the lone ranger, proliferate Western individualism and warp the meaning of being human (Kleinman, 2020). In a bid to control the image of humanity with a disconnected analogy, where everyone sees their humanity as separate from others and takes indiscriminately from nature, is a view that supports an individualistic existence devout of care. Therefore, resistance from marginalised, rural, and indigenous women confronts the mainstream paradigms of vulnerability. In this, the article’s core underpinnings are grounded on the concept of

oneness central to examining the Chipko concept (Anderson, 2006; Weaver-Hightower, 2011; Lai MA, 2013).

Redefining Femininity and Care: A Non-Western Perspective

Femininity in this article is described as a quality within an individual rather than any gender difference between 'women' and 'men'. Care, typically associated with femininity, is positioned in this article as a non-gendered based ideology (Shiva, 1999). Care is discussed as a quality that is learnt. It is a language spoken with fluency in certain communities that have anchored their humanity within the wider universal consciousness, such as the ancient African philosophy of *Ubuntu* which means *I am because we are* (Khomba, 2011; Zulu, 2018; Ngomane, 2019). Similarly, care is defined as a bedrock of our common existence, and its thick ties sustain family and community life. Kleinman (2019, p. 4) argues, "care offers an alternative story of how we live and who we are. But it is being silenced and diminished in value in the United States and around the world, sacrificed on the altar of economy and efficiency". Care can be coined for political and commercial gain by government initiatives; for example, in the United States, programmes such as *MediCare,* a government national health insurance programme or *EduCare,* a cost-effective early morning and after school programme, conjure the feeling of love through clever marketing to their political agendas, whilst in fact, our institutions are readily replacing care with efficiency models (Illich *et al.*, 1977; Kleinman, 2020). The commoditisation of care in the marketplace has displaced it from an internal quality to external action (Kleinman, 2020). From a Chipko perspective, care remains an internal quality of the women who practise it. Such perspective represent a regenerative model that lies in stark contrast to the extractive model of consumption. In the mainstream portrayal of nature as vulnerable, the ferocity of nature has been disregarded. So, to reclaim the multifaceted aspect of the feminine principle, the article uses the fierce, bloodthirsty Hindu goddess *Kali,* a quintessential embodiment of *Shakti* – the primordial cosmic energy (Dalmiya, 2000; Kumar, 2000; Chinnaiyan, 2017; Marsman, 2019). In this power of the feminine principle, the women from the Chipko movement operate beyond colonial dictates that govern the minds of those within an economic system that feed them their ideas and worldviews through a reductionist education approach (Illich, 1970). Rather, in this decolonised state of mind, the women from the Chipko movement have reclaimed control over their lives. It is not conventions and statutory rights or development programmes that have equipped the marginalised and rural women to resist illegal deforestation, but rather the operationalisation of wisdom through their folktales, songs, rituals, and learning through lived experiences of generations (Shiva, 1999). Empowered, marginalised, and rural women are present throughout history and continue to fight for

the right to all life through their collective oneness. Their courage does not stem from the enactment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) or the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1981). Instead, their participation in nature has set a deep understanding of balance and interconnectedness, drawing their strength from *shakti* – Strength; according to Itwari Devi:

> "Shakti [strength] comes to us from these forests and grasslands: we watch them grow, year in and year out through their internal shakti, and we derive our strength from it. We watch out streams renew themselves, and we drink their clear and sparkling water – that gives us Shakti. We drink fresh milk, we eat ghee, we eat food from our own fields that we are our own masters, we control and produce our own wealth. That is why 'primitive', backward women who do not buy their needs from the market but produce them themselves are leading Chipko." (Shiva, 1999, p. 198).

The agency of the women from the Chipko movement is demonstrated in their informal political participation as they mobilised communities in resistance to political and corporate pressures (Shiva and Bandyopadhyay 1986). Illiterate, marginalised, and deprived women from a Western lens are vulnerable and presumed disempowered due to an imposed Western metric that requires a level of formal education and economic wealth to meet external standards of empowerment. The vulnerable settings that encompass the political, social, cultural, economic, and religious contexts are attributed to the person themselves without any differentiation between the external influences (Butler, 2020). In this approach, agency is denied to the women and girls that are immersed in these circumstances and categorised as vulnerable. This provides the legitimacy for international development agencies to deliver programmes for development and educational purposes that fail to connect with their empowerment from a humble standpoint (Shiva, 1999). In this lies the internal empowerment of these women, independent of external circumstances (Kleinman, 1995). The rudimentary discrimination, which has its roots deep in colonialism, overlooks these women as soil scientists, peasant experts, water managers and political leaders as their activities are not accredited or form part of the formal mainstream systems (Shiva, 1999). The rural women that have exercised the Chipko concept and who have died to save their forests are not motivated by external accolades, nor are they governed by a globalised marketplace. Care is largely undermined by the globalised market economy, but nevertheless, it continues to hold families and communities together (Kleinman, 2020). Instead, care is a fundamental human expression that needs to be learnt to establish deep human connections with each other and nature (Kleinman, 2020). Lindekens and Jayawickrama (2019, p. 8)

argued that "in ancient and traditional cultures, care is divorced from financial benefits, with healing and helping others as a spiritual rather than a trade relationship between professionals and recipients". In this, care can be understood as an absolute inclusion portrayed through the act of mothering from a non-gendered based perspective, an action to include someone or something in your life unconditionally. This inclusion is central to the Chipko concept shown by these women as they embrace their trees, typifying nature as core to their own existence in an ultimate act of care at the risk of losing their own lives. This article argues that mothering is an action that can be performed by both 'men' and 'women' and much like the Chipko concept that involves understanding that we are part of nature. There lies the connection between nature and care where nature includes all beings unconditionally without discrimination. From an Indian cosmological lens (or cosmovision), all existence arises from this primordial energy which is *Shakti*, and a manifestation of this power is called *Prakriti* – Nature, or Mother Earth, as the primordial mother goddess (Shiva, 1999, p. 39). Similarly, what arises from the care of Mother Earth, or the 'Mother', is inclusivity, shown in the cyclicity of life and death, inhalation and exhalation that connects us to one another in a greater universal consciousness.

The goddess *Kali* provides a refreshing iconography that dispels gender normative associations with the feminine principle that usually portrays a 'Loving Mother'; rather, Kali is a 'Devouring Mother', embodying destruction and rebirth, death and revenge but also love in her paradoxical archetype (Dalmiya, 2000). However, beyond the feminist resistance, the goddess *Kali* can penetrate the consciousness of humans by dissolving all ignorance. *Kali* is an all-consuming force represented as a Black woman with white fangs, her tongue protruding from her mouth. With four arms, in one hand, she carries the head of a slain demon, and in another, a sword, whilst drawing closer to her worshippers. She is decorated with a necklace of skulls and earrings of two dead bodies. Only wearing a girdle made from dead men's hands, her eyes are red, bloodstained, as she stands looking all dishevelled. *Kali* menacingly has one foot on the thigh of her husband *Shiva* and her other on his chest, as shown in **Figure 1.**

Figure 1: Picture of the goddess Kali (Source: ExoticIndiaArt, 2000).

From a feminist lens, this depiction of the feminine as a bloodthirsty, violent goddess that evokes fear is disruptive. The goddess *Kali* represents an aspect of the feminine principle that is not necessarily understood in Western philosophy (Dalmiya, 2000; Shiva, 1999). The disruption and destruction she brings is very similar to the women of 1973 in the Chipko movement. And although they did not destroy, their methodology of hugging trees was disruptive, which embodies the Chipko movement. It is this multifaceted nature of the feminine principle that directly contradicts Western binary thinking and the traditional interpretation of 'woman' and femininity found within the Abrahamic religions (Dalmiya, 2000). Even Jesus (in the mainstream understanding) experienced God as father, and so, through the feminine principle, we embark on a non-violent rebellion against the authoritarian patriarchal system that forms so much of our own thinking. *Kali's* presence represents a feminine liberation through her multifaceted nature by portraying femininity as the ultimate force of destruction and creation, which is comparable to the Chipko, which also uses the feminine principle as a portrayal of disruption and resistance (Shiva, 1999).

The women who united in the Chipko Andolan movement in 1973, Uttarakhand, sent ripples worldwide at national and international levels (Mitra, 1993). The methodology of hugging is also a scientific methodological framework of sacrifice for the greater good; this very humane act embodies the boldness and moral language between suffering and healing that is care. As argued by Kleinman (2020), care is the bedrock of our human existence. The sacredness to care ought not to be commoditised and sold in the marketplace (Varoufakis, 2019). What it results in is a manipulation of yet another service economy where larger sways of rural and marginalised people are stripped from their agency in the proliferation of branding affected communities as vulnerable. Inequality breeds a service economy. It is the only way for such a relationship to flourish, where one person is made vulnerable and disempowered and therefore needs a service that makes them empowered (Illich *et al.*, 1977). The Chipko concept through the lens of care becomes more than just a powerful ecological movement as it advocates for a shift in thinking. In a similar manner, *Kali's* boon is won when humans confront and accept their real nature. Despite the false confidence that comes with formal mainstream education in many social circles in the Global North and South that position those mainly learned as experts, care continues to be operationalised by rural and marginalised and indigenous communities. Regardless of the good intentions of heroism that comes with wanting to save the planet or each other, we are not saviours, but rather, through care, we become interconnected, and in this connected state a co-learning and self-governance emerges that makes part of a complex learning web that is centred on empowerment rather than preserving a power imbalance between the expert and recipient (Kumar, 2000). In this deep wisdom of the feminine principle that is immersed in care, we change our critical consciousness and act in a sacrificial manner as our identity is no longer limited to our narrow set of beliefs, likes and judgement (Sadhguru, 2021). The Chipko concept is self-modelled through the complete absorption of ourselves into nature (Dalmiya, 2000). It is not simply sacrificial, but the women of the Chipko movement understand that care and love can only be expressed through a deep immersion of intimacy that draws in one's ability to be present and connected (Kleinman, 2020). Their interaction with nature, and ability to feel, feed, water and care with their hands displays their intimate relationship with nature (Shiva, 1999). From an identity lens, what emerges from the Chipko concept is a deep awareness of the ***who am I really?*** because we are part of nature, and in a much more spiritual way, we are nature (M, 2012).

In understanding care from the operationalisation of women from marginalised and rural backgrounds, what emerges is a united approach to how these women use their hands, their dedication to regeneration and worship, all of which point towards a non-compartmentalisation to living (Shiva, 1999). These entrenched knowledge systems are largely disregarded by the expert that enters such contexts of marginality overlooking indigenous and traditional knowledge systems and

approaches. The feminist principle of care holds an opposing worldview to the mainstream (Western) knowledge system that produces the experts (Shiva, 1999). Technology, education, and health systems are driven based on this reductive worldview and are reflected in the accreditation system that is designed for the benefit of the globalised marketplace and is consequently piled against the learner (Bassey *et al.*, no date; Schinske and Tanner, 2014; Schneider and Hutt, 2014; Pimlott-Wilson and Coates, 2019). From a caring lens, if our institutions, including those caring professions could be built on a model of care and not efficiency, the promotion of self-reliance, usefulness and conviviality would be prioritised over profit (Illich, 1973). The arrogance of current modern systems do not reflect some of the harsh realities that dispel the idea of humans as the centre of the universe, "if all the insects were to disappear from the earth, within 50 years, all life on earth would end. If all human beings disappeared from the earth, within 50 years all forms of life would flourish" (Jonas Salk; 1914 – 1995). Unfortunately, 'vulnerability' has been marketed and drives funding through development and educational initiatives that profiteer from rural, indigenous, and affected communities particularly women and girls, such as the failed UN Decade for Women, a programme that received funding based on the assumption that women's economic position would progress through its participation. The humanitarian and development landscape is filled with miss funding and failed opportunities to understand these affected communities and work with people as equals. For instance, in the 2015 Nepal earthquake, the international response was slow and inadequate, because the relief effort failed to reach the affected communities in remote and rural areas due to the bureaucratic funding procedures (Subedi et al., 2019).

What is missing from international humanitarian responses and development agendas is a coming together where different knowledge systems are equally applied, and each can learn from one another (Lindekens and Jayawickrama, 2019). For this to take place, an equal partnership needs to be forged. This could be best illustrated through the scientific grounding of the women of the Chipko movement and their understanding of true forestry (Shiva, 1999). The question that surges is how are 'uneducated' rural and marginalised women empowered? This narrative does not fit the Western standard of an 'empowered woman' that is largely measured by a certain level of formal education, formal political participation, and an active participation in the marketplace. This article further argues that the development discourse has dominated and excluded women from non-Western societies by imposing a vulnerability status that dismisses their self-governance and their traditional knowledge systems, excluding them from global mainstream decision-making processes. This is largely a consequence of non-formal participation in politics, education, and the market economy. Our current mainstream education system penalises those that are not consumers of knowledge of

mainstream compulsory education and are therefore labelled as uneducated, disregarding them as expert foresters (Illich, 1973).

The Chipko movement has a long historical journey, for example the Chipko process in the Garhwal Himalayas followed a similar pattern of events through various actors, particularly by Mira Behn, one of Gandhi's closest disciples. She studied closely the knowledge of the local people and Garhwali folksong, which encapsulated the collective wisdom of the community that told of the species of the local area[11]. The folk songs of this community exposed the degeneration in the region due to the disappearance of the *Banj Oak* tree (Shiva, 1999). Mira Behn was able to capture this scientific report, and it is this diversity of knowledge and wisdom that marks the ability of communities to remain uncolonised. The link between degeneration and colonisation is found in the violent end to the natural evolution of societies and people, in the same manner degeneration destroys nature. Therefore, there is a misplacement in the presumption of a deficit of knowledge that is usually attributed to marginalised and affected communities by mainstream education and development programmes, and it is rather the inability of these institutions to recognise knowledge outside the boundaries of formal education and hold it with the same esteem. The question then arises about the value of mainstream education and the discrimination against the unschooled. The radical monopoly of compulsory consumption of education has deprived humans of their intrinsic capabilities of vision and creation. An education system focused on memorising and repeating is flawed and destroys the science of experience that has been practised by ancient and indigenous societies through observation that is traditionally shared (Illich, 1973). Science that stems from the European enlightenment era established a monopoly of one type of science, negating the different sciences used by different civilisations and traditions that are also science, such as the Chipko data gathering that is a scientific process (Shiva,1999) This calls for the delegitimization of Western mainstream education and its monopoly on learning. The presumption of deficit of knowledge legitimises one group as scientists and the other as ignorant through a complex system of accreditation, a system that costs more to maintain than it does to teach (Illich, 1970). This is the basis for discussing Chipko as a concept and not as a movement to avoid the erroneous assumption that there is no scientific grounding for the actions of the rural women of India that united under its concept. In this deliberate disruption to modern science that is relatively within its infancy, like formal mainstream education, the terms science and scientific are to encompass its diverse application that makeup traditional knowledge systems regardless of any recognition by the positivist and reductionist

[11] The *Banj Oak trees* and *Kharij trees are highly valued species common to the Uttarakhand region in India (Shiva, 1999)*

approach to modern Western thought. Therefore, this article argues the Chipko concept is based on traditional scientific intelligence and has both an ontological and epistemological grounding.

The communities that follow the feminine principles of non-violence understand humility not as a weakness or a lack of confidence but as a deeper understanding of the ineptitude of our understanding and dependence upon our five senses that are faulty (Vivekananda, 1989; Gandhi, 2001). The feminine principle in this article has been discussed as a non-gendered based ideology. An example of this is the later life of Gandhi, who applied feminine principles and non-violence as a way of life, as he moved towards the dissolvent of all attachment, *'Nishkama Karma*as' – '*action without attachment'*. He lived through experiments that drew him into a deeper state of the feminine, practising care through the service of others: "my aptitude for nursing gradually developed into a passion, so much so that it often led me to neglect my work, and on occasions, I engaged not only my wife but the whole household in such service. Such service can have no meaning unless one takes pleasure in it" (Gandhi, 2001, p. 169). Care is not a quality that represents weakness, but it is dual in its ability to be strong yet delicate, compassionate, and resistant. Those living within the feminine principle of exercising care are in a state of balance, which has shown as lacking in western mainstream societies. It is therefore important to reflect upon those biases that remain so entrenched in our worldview regarding care. Perhaps it too is time to look beyond our expert status and learn from women and girls from rural, indigenous, and marginalised backgrounds on how to operationalise care and the principles of femininity.

Conclusion

It is a daring act to look at the care operationalised by women and girls from rural and marginalised backgrounds, particularly when those examples lie beyond the margins of mainstream education and the globalised market economy. In the acts of care lies the empowerment of these women who, through the Chipko concept, are empowered beyond jobs and schools. Despite the comforts and technological advancements that come with our modern western society, the Chipko concept is more than a movement, its re-defined feminine principle provides a backdrop for which to question our transactional relationship with our governments and institutions. It leaves bare the void between citizenship and consumer. The women from the Chipko movement are ardent citizens, taking responsibility for their environment and each other. To them, the forest was more than a resource, it was a part of them and their survival. The disablement of people can be better understood by the dependency on a service economy. Contrary to those are the communities that are self-sufficient and

exercise care freely, they are not bound by a system founded on consumption. Rather, the misplaced confidence in the educated status has deepened a disconnect between us and nature: this void is the absence of care. The broad brushstrokes of vulnerability that are usually applied to marginalised, rural and indigenous communities, particularly to women and girls, prevent an examination into the political, social, cultural, and economic implications of those vulnerable settings, leaving in the shadows the greed of a service needs economy (Illich, 1970, 1973, 1978; Illich *et al.*, 1977; Brown and Samuel, 2013). In the proliferation of arrogance that surges from the consumption of education rises an inability to learn from the coping with uncertainty and danger from the 'uneducated' (Illich, 1970). This critical examination of the Chipko concept calls on a reflective practice from those that see themselves as separate from others. Our humanity is intertwined, and beneath the various settings that colour our lives, we have a shared humanity. The path that we take to achieve happiness is different. Some paths are paved with gold but deliriously empty and superficial, whilst others, though walking through rubble, find community cohesion as they walk together through the peaks and troughs that is life without numbing the pain but addressing it as best they can (Watts, 1987). The glue that continues to gel communities together is the force of care which, despite efforts to commoditise it, continues to be displayed in some of the bravest of moments through history.

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