

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

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ECOFEMINISM : DEVASTATION OF EARTH AND RUKMANI' S SUFFERINGS IN *NECTAR IN A SIEVE*

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ABSTRACT

The paper explore the ecofeminism strain in the *Nectar in a Sieve*. Exploitation of earth and the protagonist Rukmani runs hand in hand. Rukmani is thoroughly conscious of the loses the modernization, urbanization and development causes to her and to her village.

KEYWORDS: Ecofeminism , Biodiversity Conservation ,simultaneously homogenizes and fragments.

INTRODUCTION –

Text: Ecofeminism, the term first used by Francoise D' Eubonne, echoes that woman and earth are equally treated by man. This relation was proved by Annette Kolodney. *Ecofeminism* by Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies is a milestone in the woman and nature studies. They heralded a new segment in literature where



prominence is given to women's contribution. In the essay "Women Women's Indigenous Knowledge and Biodiversity Conservation" Shiva recognizes women's role in biodiversity preservation. They clear the aim of the book one by one:

One is to make visible the 'other' global processes that are becoming increasingly invisible as a new world order emerges based on the control of people and resources worldwide for the sake of capital accumulation. Another is the optimistic belief that a search for identity and difference will become more significant as a platform for resistance against

the dominant global forces of capitalist patriarchy, which simultaneously homogenizes and fragments(02).

She accuses 'modernization and development' for being responsible for degradation of nature. She says that diversity is women's expertise which is 'displaced by progressive technologies that destroy both diversity and people's livelihood.' (165) She discards the general opinion that diversity based product system has low productivity. She also indicates that in spite of their hardwork women could not be recognized as farmer. She calls

woman as 'custodian of biodiversity'. She also finds rituals and festivals as preservatives of biodiversity which is different from experimental science. For these reason her book is named as 'Ecofeminism' which echoes that woman and nature are close and equally harassed by progressive science and industry. Maria Mies believes that catching up development path is myth and it only leads to ecocolonialism. This idea of development can never be realized. This idea creates the words like self-determination, self-interest and if we apply self-interest to the ecological problem only and only lead to the intensification of the ecological crises. Mies cites an example of a woman who says to Mies that mother's milk is poisoned in Germany. She suggests a solution that a special nullet ragi which grows on Deccan Plateau should be

processed and canned as baby food. It should be imported to Germany. It will solve the problem of desperate mothers in Germany and money paid for this nullet to the poors in South India will become a source of income and it will contribute to their development. Thus Mies explains that ragi will enter in world market and it will not be a cheap food and become costly. Pesticides will be applied to get more production. The woman answered that ragi production should be controlled by those who guarantee that it will not be polluted. Thus she evolves a new eco-colonialism because she sacrifices poor people for mother's need. Poor people need only money and not healthy food. Healthy food is bought by those who have money. But it is interesting to note that when those poor people will have the money from where they will get healthy food which they now have free of cost. She says "This example clearly shows that the myth of catching- up development, based on the belief of the miraculous workings of the market, in fact leads to antagonistic interests even of mothers, who want only to give their infants unpolluted food." (68).

The paper seeks to outline the, ecofaminism in *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya. In this novel she portrays the problems of rural India especially of Rukmani. When the novel opens we see Nathan and Rukmani are happy in an idyllic village. She shows more reasonable attitude towards the loss of nature than that of the men. She always opposes urbanization which ruins her life.

'Not in the town, where all that was natural had long been sacrificed, but on its outskirts, one could still see the passing of the seasons. For in the town there were the crowds, and streets battened down upon the earth, and the filth that men had put upon it; and one walked with care for what might lie beneath one's feet or threaten from before or behind; and in this preoccupation forgot to look at the sun or the stars, or even to observe they had changed their setting in the sky : and knew nothing of the passage of time save in dry frenzy, by looking at a clock. But for use, who lived by the green, quiet fields, perilously close though these were to the town, nature still gave its muted message. Each passing day, each week, each month, left its sign, clear and unmistakable (115).

The growing urbanization snatches their happiness. Their sons Arjun and Thambi are taken by plantation in Ceylon. Murugan goes to city to work. They never return to her she expresses her filings in the following words: 'From the day construction began on the hospital Selvam ceased to belong to us. During the preparations, while the site was bought and cleared, and a contractor engaged to find men and material, he spent his time with Kenny, and what they discussed I do not know, but sometimes he came home elated and sometimes he was mcrose and dejected; and it was clear enough that the many delays they encountered irked his spirit beyond the telling (122).'

The tannery established in the village ruins her life. It also disturbs the life of Kunthi and Janaki. Kunthi is also disturbed by the industrialization her two sons are taken by the tannery. Janaki is also suffers because of the increasing competition in shop keeping.

Attraction for city life and crop failure also causes havoc to Rukman's life. She notes that her third son, Murugan, who was a servant, married a girl from the town in which he worked. They had not seen her, nor did they know her family, and the marriage, in the second year after Sacrabani's birth, was solemnized at her parents' house without either of us being present.

Rukamni is concerned for animals and non human world throughout the novel she is happy to see the bullock unyoked. She is happy to have given them water and hay. She notices the change in the behavior of bullock. She walks them that they 'began stepping, jauntily again'(3) great upheavals come in her life but she is always concerned for the well being of the animal. Her eyes quickly caught the ailment of the animal. She has compassion for every suffering creature. Thus she is aware of marginalization may be it of anyone. She shows concern for the cart man who is overworking. Anywhere in the mind she believes that animals are exploited by the humans and in Possession she declares that animals are not created for man.

There is one more similarity between earth and her life. She like earth knows that she needs patience and stoicism. She needs endurance like earth. She knows that nothing but God and stoicism will work. Not only Rukmani but we see Kunthi and Ira are also suffering. At this movement Rekha Jha comments:

Rukmani thereby explains the need for stoicism. There is no pessimism in this but a deep-rooted faith in God's mercies. When Kali's hut is destroyed in the storm she is thankful that at least "it stood until the worst was

over." Rukmani too is of the same faith. When her barren daughter Ira is forsaken by her husband, she consoles her saying "we are all in God's hands and He is merciful. These are the vicissitudes of life just as a good harvest follows a drought to give us another chance of belief in His mercy. Nothing is unbearable and man's indomitable spirit can help him surmount those tribulations by endurance." (59)

Death of Nathan is stoically tolerated by Rukmani. She like muted earth speaks no word against anyone when he dies. She thus describes his pathetic death "And so I laid my face on his and for a while his breath fell soft and light as a rose petal on my cheek, then he sighed as if in weariness and turned his face to me, and so his gentle spirit withdrew and the light went out in his eyes." (188). Her life, aspiration, hopes and happiness really appear to be out of her hand. K.R. Shrinivas Iyengar "Calm after storm, spring after winter-such is the unending cycle. One must hope, and one must persevere even if one is engaged only in trying to discover 'nectar in a sieve'!" (439).

Rukmani is also gender conscious. She believes that the earth is also possessed by men. Land, like women, is harassed by men. She comments "Ira and I did what we could ; but the land is mistress to man, not to woman : the heavy work land is mistress to man, not to woman : the heavy work needed is beyond her strength"(129).

Industrialism ruins Rukmani's family as well as her village. The encroachment of industry causes the decay of natural beauty, plays havoc with village economy, uproots a tenant-farmer and brings in social degradation and the loss of traditional and human values. The traditional set up is overtaken by a change of far reaching consequences. The coming of Tannery is the beginning of this change in the life of Rukmani and her village. She records that the change which came into her life, into all lives, blasting its way into village, seemed wrought in the twinkling of an eye. The tannery is a symbol of Rukmani's sufferings and also of the suffering of the land.

Apart from Markandaya if we look for the concern for biodiversity perseverance in literature we find Shiva true because the first lady to earn her livelihood by stage writing "Aphra Behn, in her novel *Oroonoko* (published in 1688). Already pondered what the increasingly intense clearing of the Caribbean forest would mean for the indigenous people and animals relegated to the diminishing woods". (Gebert, 345).

Thus we see that Shiva's stand is upright because the losses of Rukmani and the nature are same. With industrialization and tannery nature loses its beauty and property and becomes mistress of Englishman. In the same way Rukmani loses her bread because their land is snatched and her husband and sons are dead. Her daughter Ira becomes mistress of men from tannery. Rukmani just like the earth is left destitute and utterly alone. Shiva is also right when she says that women show a more responsible attitude towards the use of nature. Rukmani's stand and radical thoughts against industrialization remind us that "Based on the shared experience, women, must speak up for nature because nature cannot speak for itself or at least is generally not "heard" when it does" (Wrede, 41).

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