

Ecofeminism in Gift in Green by Sara joseph

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The term ecofeminism was coined by Francois d' Eaubonne in 1974. Ecofeminism can be considered as a branch of ecocriticism and feminism. The theory associates nature with women. Ecofeminist critics views the literary text as a manifestation of the established relation between woman and nature. They distinct culture and society as patriarchal and exploitative. Here man is equated with culture and women with nature as in the expression of 'mother earth'. The idea of mother earth in this philosophy can be compared or associated to the archetypal symbol of 'the earth mother' who is a symbol of fruition, abundance and fertility. The archetypal mother earth is a character who traditionally offers spiritual and emotional nourishment to those with whom she comes in contact. Often depicted in earth colours has large breasts and hips or voluptuous body which is symbolic of her childbearing capacities. Archetypal symbols are universal and common in every myths. There is an archetypal symbolism as well, and according to that concept this universe is symbolically constructed. The existence of opposing ideas which is symbolised as in nature versus mechanistic where the world of nature is good while technology is evil. There is another example of water versus desert where water is essential for life and growth. It commonly appears as a birth symbol as in baptism which symbolises a spiritual birth. Rain, rivers, oceans...etc. also functions the same way. The desert suggests the opposite.

The above mentioned archetypes are important for the ecofeminist criticism also. So the feminisation of nature or naturalisation of women is a universal phenomenon in most of the cultures around the world. Here men or masculinity is linked to objectivity, rationality and mind while women or femininity is related to subjectivity, emotionality and physicality. Here women or nature is the vulnerable and prey and men is the exploiter and predator. Ecofeminist critics studies and analyses the literary texts in terms of this female characters who are exploited, oppressed and subjugated by men and patriarchal culture. The

philosophy of ecofeminism contends the notion of considering and treating women and nature as essentially exploitable objects. The practitioners of this philosophy proposes an alternative world view that worships and values earth as sacred and recognises the essential dependents of humanity upon the natural world, and embraces all life as valuable. There are two branches of ecofeminism which is radical ecofeminism and cultural ecofeminism. Radical ecofeminism points out the exploitation of women and nature by men and culture through revealing the practices of the patriarchal domination of both. The aspect of commodifying both nature and women by equating it while the men elevates themselves as superior and capable of establishing the order. So this aspect is questioned and targeted by the radical ecofeminists.

Cultural ecofeminists on the other hand, promotes an association between women and the environment by focussing on the more intimate and organic relationship between them. They are the procreators and nurturers of life by their biology and this makes the part of the reproductive mechanism of nature, in the form of menstruation, pregnancy and lactation. So according to these idea, women and nature are more sensitive and interlinked. Cultural ecofeminism is explicitly visible in nature based religions, Goddesses and nature worship as a way of redeeming both spirituality. The indigenous traditions across the globe worships the mother Goddess who creates instead of the omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent father God.

There are some new modern branches of ecofeminism which are vegetarian ecofeminism, materialist ecofeminism and spiritual ecofeminism. Vegetarian ecofeminism highlights and proposes ideas and slogans like "animals are friends, not food", "I think, therefore I am vegan" and so on. Materialist ecofeminism connects or interlinks institutions such as labour, power and property as the source of dominance over women and nature. Spiritualist ecofeminism

gives emphasis to theology and myths stands against materialism because of the significance given to women, nature and all forms of life.

“Life seemed to them like a deep, bottomless lagoon. They had no food, no cloths, no shelter. But one thing they had which is water. It lay full and brimming, like unending, ever-renewing, fountain-spring of life.”(44) Gift in Green is the story of a fictional, dystopian place named Aathi. The sons and daughters of Aathi lives in a peaceful, sacred, pure and pristine environment which is not contaminated or infected by the nuclear rays of modernity. Their culture and life style is located with and focused on alternate farming of paddy and fish. They are surrounded, protected and nurtured by water. The cool, shadowy and damp muds and marsh of Aathi and Green bangle provides them their basic needs of fresh pokkali rice, oysters, crab and fish. They lived a water life with simple and limited needs. They were safe, secured and protected in the lap of nature from the outside world. They lived in perfect harmony with the nature. The purity and sanctity of their life and atmosphere got infected and contaminated by the presence of outsiders or the representatives of modernity and with bridge that connects this paradise of nature with the noise and crowd of outer city.

There is an abundance of elements and characters in this novel which symbolises or epitomises the different aspects of ecofeminism, Apart from the main characters, the writer brings out instances from various myths, folk tales, Zen and Sufi tales...etc about water the universal solvent. The people of Aathi does not have different religions and Gods. They believed and worshiped only one God and they named him Thampuran. They did not believed in idol worshipping either. There were gatherings of storytelling nights in front of the small shrine of Thampuran. Story tellers reach Aathi as if they are guided and inspired by a divine spirit from the nook and corner of the world. In one of such nights, the Biblical story Hagar (mother of Ishmael) who was deserted and abandoned by her husband is conveyed. She receives the divine blessings of nature and finds a spring in the middle of the desert when she and her baby was about to die because of hunger and thirst. Further the springs develops into an oasis and tribal settlements. Hagar becomes the mother, protector and care taker of that spring. There are many such female characters who represents the different aspects of ecofeminism both radical and

cultural in different contexts of the novel. Such as Kunjimathu, Shylaja, Gitanjali and Kayal..etc.

Kunjimathu is the exact and perfect example of the mystic, mysterious, divine and spiritual communication of nature with women. According to Susan Griffin, the feminist and nature writer, plainly states that women have some level of communication with nature that men cannot attain. Men view this communication in a suspicious attitude and tries to break this bond with nature and women in every possible way.

“He says that woman speaks with nature. That she hears voices from under the earth. That wind blows in her ears and trees whispers to her. But for him, this dialogues is over. He says that he is not part of this world as a stranger. He set himself apart from free women and nature.”(Griffin, Women and Nature).

Kunjimathu is the perfect epitome of the mother earth figure. Just like all the other girls of Aathi, she also connects her life and soul with water and the pure, pristine nature of Aathi. Aathi and its water is integral and the life driving source to the people. Kumaran is the representative of modernity and patriarchal society who leaves Aathi and Kunjimathu who was once his beloved, to seek his fortune in city life and modernity. Before leaving Aathi, he possess kunjimathu’s virginity by taking advantage of her. After long years, he returns to Aathi as a rich businessman to take over the land. He tries to replace the quiet, green and shady village with concrete jungles and shopping malls with his so-called developmental strategies.

Kunjimthu even after betrayed and deprived by Kumaran, decides to take care of the land and his parents. “To this day, it was Kunjimathu who lit the lamps at the burial mounds. One wick for Thampuran. A second for kumaran’s father. A third for Kumaran’s mother. That was love.”(41)

The patience and care of the mother earth. Aathi and its nature is part of their soul and spirit for the women. They realises the deterioration and the upcoming disasters and harmful consequences of nature destruction before men and tries to warn them. But their warning were rejected and neglected naturally. The results of this was terrible and they were under the threat of death. “For every high, there was a low; for all her life, she had lived with that article of faith. It had never betrayed her.” (194)

The women of Aathi receives premonitions and epiphanies. The day when komban joy mixes

endosulfan in the Pokkali paddy fields Kunjimathu, she had a nightmare coincidentally. “The sweet aroma of her body caressed the water tenderly. Tiny fingerlings darted and danced all around her. The birds that came to peck the grains perched themselves on her shoulders. The sight of Kumaran terrified kunjimathu, the birds and fingerlings alike.” (170)

There is amazing and picturesque images of blissful moments where kunjimathu and her companions enjoys and realises the nature within them and around them. It is described in such a beautiful way that the love and power of nature fulfils her soul with eternal bliss. They were feeling and enjoying the rising moon at night. But Kumaran’s erected concrete bund were obstructing the free flow of water which can be symbolised as the attempts of patriarchal society to control and prevent connection between nature and women.

“The rising moon churned her womanhood. Her body arched the rose, impelled by the longing to drag into her the man who loomed her far beyond the reached. Her veins, alleys for the moonlight, her stomach its mansion, and her womb its very manger.” (192).

She imagines the ocean as a girl. Just as the ocean arouse in the moonlight, so did the woman experience under the moonrise of man. For her, the ocean was a metaphor of her life. Aathi can be an ideal state of mind or a dystopia which exist only in the dreams. It is a place where there is equality and simplicity.

“In Aathi, anyone could leave anything anywhere, no matter how precious, and sleep with their doors open. Safe as in mother’s womb, guarded by warm sentinel of encircling water, Aathi has stood secure for ages” (52)

But the meditative peace, tranquillity everything collapses by the arrival of Kumaran. He destroys and diminishes everything started with the ancient silence and calmness of Aathi. He destroys the Green bangle which was the habitat of so many lives and even the shrine of Tampuran. Apart from kunjimathu, there are other figures of mother earth such as Gitanjali who followed the divine call of the nature of Aathi. The purpose of Gitanjali is to save Kayal, her daughter who is suffering from a strange disease. Her guru and mentor instructed her to follow the call of water. The magical power and healing capacity of water saves Kayal from her trauma and muteness. Kayal was a little girl who was wounded by the city life and its evil faces.

Kunjimathu, Shylaja and many of those women were willing to sacrifice their life for their mother, to save Aathi from its destruction. There is the presence of an unnamed girl who cleans the plastic waste which is the island itself. She was only visible to Noor Mohammed, a story teller and frequent visitor of Aathi. Kumaran and his supporters even though tries to convert Aathi to a dry, barren dump yard, after breaking all his limits, the nature reacts so badly that everything was cleansed by rain and river ultimately and the life started to bloom again shown the cyclical nature. When Kunjimathu gets glimpses of the upcoming destruction, she identifies and feels that she has transformed to a condition similar to that of Hagar’s. If Hagar was abandoned by her husband, it was her Thampuran who abandoned kunjimathu and Aathi. Elaine Showalter in her towards a feminist poetics describes the three stages of women’s writings which is the feminine, feminist and female. Kunjimathu represents the female stage where she discovers herself and identifies her power of being independent. Life has transformed her or elevated her to such a state of mind.

So to conclude, Sara Joseph’s Aathi or Gift in Green an example of the ecriture feminine writings of Malayalam literature. This book is a long soulful poem for every woman who looks deep into their soul for the reflections and reverberations of nature or to everyone who wish to escape from the tiresome numbness of city life and modernity to immerse themselves in the peaceful sanctity or the primordial blissfulness of nature.

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