

Indira Goswami's 'The Blue Necked God' from Eco Feminist Perspective

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doi.org/10.64643/IJIRTV12I8-140000-459

Abstract—Eco feminism always plays pivotal role in unveiling the relationship of nature and human especially women and is deeply connected to the concept of Eco criticism. Eco feminism studies the bond that exists between women and nature, in particular, it shows how patriarchal societies treat both women and nature. Women and nature both are eventually sensitive and inevitable components of cosmos and both are mistreated by male dominated society. Indira Goswami's novel 'The Blue Necked God' highlights complex relation between condition of women and nature. It also explores how women and nature mingle with each other when it comes to treat them by male dominated world. Indira Goswami has portrayed several women characters and their condition in this novel which shows how women are deeply connected with nature. The present research paper aims to analyze Indira Goswami's novel 'The Blue Necked God' from eco feminist perspective by exploring parallel condition of women and nature and how they are exploited by patriarchal figures of society.

Index Terms—Eco feminism, Eco criticism, women, nature, exploitation

I. INTRODUCTION

Ecofeminism is 1970s movement which is known as feminist approach to understand ecology. This approach more or less shows conscious connection between nature and women. Ecofeminists believe that there is a strong connection between domination of nature and exploitation of women. Ecofeminism explores the ideology that nature and women are being exploited and controlled by men as their own which is quite inferior to both women and nature. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, "Ecofeminism is defined as philosophical and political theory and movement which combines

ecological corners with feminist ones, regarding both as resulting from male domination of society." (7)

The term Ecofeminism is coined by French feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne in her work *Feminism or Death* (1974) in order to urge the women to lead ecological revolution to save the planet earth and environment. After that the development of ecofeminism as a leading theory is highly influenced by both ecological movements and feminism. Men who control the land that is nature are often seen to oppress women; hence they are responsible for the destruction of nature. In this way it is noted that ecofeminism examines how women and nature are treated by patriarchal society. This philosophy also examines how both nature and women are being put into dominance unjustly by societal rules and regulation. Ecofeminism focuses to change the ideology of male dominance on both women and nature. Ecofeminists demand change in the society by giving importance to natural world above everything. Ecofeminism believes that there is a close relation between oppression of women and exploitation of nature. There are numerous literary works in which there is a deep exploration of nature and women by patriarchal society.

Mary Mellor writes in her book *Feminism and Ecology*,

Ecofeminism is a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. It emerged in the mid-1970s alongside second wave of feminism and the green movement. Ecofeminism brings together elements of the feminist and green movements, while at the same time offering a challenge to both. It takes from the green movement a concern about the impact of human activities on the non-human world and from feminism the view of humanity as gendered in ways

that subordinate, exploit and oppress women (Mellor 1).

Furthermore one of the well-known ecofeminist writer and scholar Greta Gaard claims that “ecofeminism’s basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature” (Gaard 1)

Indira Gishwami known as Mamoni Raisom Goswami is a renowned Assamese writer. She has gained a reputable fame in the field of literature after starting her literary career mere at the age of 13. She has written many thought provoking works in literature and many of them translated into various languages. Indira Goswami’s work *The Blue Necked God* (1976) is one of her thought provoking works on the sense of deep ecology. The work is set to explore oppression of women and exploitation of nature in the Brindavan. Goswami has uncovered the harsh truth of life of widows known as Radheshyamis in Brindavan. Indira Goswami has skillfully depicted the existing relation between subjection of women and destruction of nature by male dominance in the novel *The Blue Necked God*. Originally written in Assamese language as *Nilkantha Braja* by Indira Goswami and then translated into English language by Gayatri Bhattacharya the novel *The Blue Necked God* is finest of example of depiction of ecofeminism in literature. Indira Goswami has shown great concern for both nature and women who are being constantly exploited by patriarchal world of Brindavan.

Saudamini the protagonist of the novel comes to Brindavan to live there as her parents Dr. Roychoudhury and Anupama find out her love affair with Christian guy after she became widow. Their religious orthodox ritual says that a widow should spend her life in Brindavan after her husband’s death to find peace in her soul and sacrifice her life to the Krishna’s feet being Radheshyamis. Saudamini has been taken to Brindavan with the same intention but here Saudamini has witnessed total contrast atmosphere. She witnessed the naked truth of how widows are being treated by men of Brindavan as sexual object. In the same way Saudamini has seen the land and nature of Brindavan being dominated by patriarchal power. In the beginning of the novel when

Saudamini enters into Brindavan with her parents who brought her there, she sees that the atmosphere is being polluted. She observes that the forest of Brindavan once was flourished with trees and plants are now destructed. The dull main street of Brindavan is evidence of deforestation.

Saudamini turned to look and saw forests of dust-laden trees and thick prickly bushes. The branches and twigs of some of these had dried up and looked like thin, dry, fish bones. The purple blossoms on these plants looked like artificial flowers someone had struck on the dried-up branches (Goswami 3). Dr. Roy Choudhury started to work at dispensary there and lived there with Saudamini. As soon as Saudamini starts moving around the streets of Brindavan after settling down at Brindavan she witnessed the pathetic condition of widows. The irony is that people of Brindavan Offer Mountain and mountains of food to lord Krishna but the widows of the same city starve during day and night for one time meal to eat. Many a time Those widows have to beg for food even during festivities. Saudamini witnessed the condition of widows there who are not getting two times proper meal and on the other side land of Brindavan is also exploited by patriarchal figures for their own benefits and use. Goswami has depicted here how women and land of Brindavan is being dominated by male figures. Widows of Brindavan are being exploited by men for their own pleasure as as the land of Brindavan. It becomes clear from the conversation between Saudamini and Mrinalini that some of the Men of Brindavan dig the earth to let the snake come out and make them go into people’s house so that they can ask money to let the snakes out from house by helping them in doing so. From the below conversation it becomes clear how men of Brindavan are not letting go nature even for their own benefits In the meantime a few people who had come to perform the tarpan had collected nearby and an old man was digging the roots of old Arjun tree.

“What is he Digging for?” she asked.

“Snakes” replied Shashi.

Shashi laughed and repeated, “Yes, snakes. Then he will go around letting the snakes into people’s homes. Later, when the snakes are found, he himself will go as a snake charmer, find the reptiles and take money as reward his good deed” (Goswami 62)

Saudamini in one of her visits around Brindavan notices a man who was selling things made out by killing different animals so that he can earn more money from that. "In a stall near the Singha Duar (the Lion Door), Saudamini noticed a man selling medicines. He occupied a large space where he displayed strange thing like tiger oil, crocodile skin, the bones and bile of various fish, and so on. (Goswami 11-12).

Even widows of Brindavan are being forced to live with sadhus if they want a good life, time to time food and protection from other men's harassment. If they do not do so they face the critical scenario to live there. They are being forced to live in the filthy rooms without any hygiene. Not only that but many a time it happens that when one of the widows dies she even does not get proper cremation, instead their bodies were being threw away to the Yamuna River. Sadhus of Brindavan even steal whatever that abandoned body of widow has on it like gold, money, etc. If any widow wants a proper cremation and proper ritual after death then she has to give her all the money to any man there to perform her death ritual when she is alive. The pathetic situation of widow and her living is seen when Saudamini visits one of the filthy living area of those widows. She climbed down the broken and faded old steps. She saw an old unused well, the top of which was covered with a few moss wooden planks. Nearby were some small and dark dilapidated rooms that looked more like pigeon holes than human habitations. A large group of widowed radheshyamis dwelt here. They were grossly undernourished and wore dirty and faded old dhotis (Goswami 20-21). This shows both women and nature are in pitiful situation in Brindavan exploited by men. Further, women and nature's similar condition is seen when there is a comparison which is seen clearly between the water of Yamuna's bank and Widows' lives. It is seen that water on the banks of Yamuna has been dried up just like the life of Radheshyami widows has been marginalized in the Brindavan. The dried up water of Yamuna shows the pathetic and pitiful existence of widows. It is also thought provoking that people of Brindavan pray to Radharani- the female figure being devotee by saying loudly "Jai Radharani ji" "jai Yamuna jai" but they cannot treat the widows of the same city as a human.

Nature's exploitation is clearly seen through the description of Yamuna River in the novel as Goswami writes; In the dry season, in the months of December and January, when the waters of the Jamuna receded far beyond chirharan Ghat, the banks of this sacred river looked completely different. The ruins of ancient monuments that had been destroyed on the whim of man, or of nature, which had lain submerged in the river during the rainy season, now became exposed and looked terrible, littered with the shells of dead tortoises, the half burnt chadors of the married women who had been cremated there, and other similar gruesome thing (Goswami 29). Indira Goswami empathizes with animal by depicting how men give deplorable treatment to them. She illustrates how the bullock carts are laden with such a heavy weight that it becomes impossible for bullocks to pull over the cart ahead.

"They were so heavily burdened with people and baggage, that the necks of the poor bullocks drawing them almost touched the ground under the sheer weight". (Goswami 11).

Nature is treated as nature only by woman in this novel as there is a description of Saudamini enjoys nature as a whole. Saudamini feels calm when she sits near nature like around water, beneath trees, etc. She always goes to the nature when she feels uncomfortable in the atmosphere of Brindavan and she only find solace in nature while the site of Brindavan makes her depressing everytime.. Even the widows of Brindavan despite their marginal status, have profound understanding of importance of natural world. They understand cycle of seasons, rhythms of river and delicate balance of life.

Indira Goswami identifies here women as nature as she draws our attention that women and nature are not different but women in this novel are a form of nature itself. There is only one purush in Brindavan that is lord Krishna. She further writes, the one and only purush in the Braj was the flute playing Lord Krishna . all else was Prakruti. (Goswami 110).

II. CONCLUSION

In the novel *The Blue Necked God* Indira Goswami has evoked the ideology of ecofeminism by exploring

how nature and women are being treated and used by men for their own benefit and pleasure. They both entity possess marginalized status in the world full of men. Indira Goswami has also stood out from this marginalized treatment by depicting the protagonist Saudamini who is not accepting this marginalized treatment of men and throughout the novel she tries to make adifference being a women and a part of nature itself.

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