

Ecofeminist Perspectives on Nature, Politics, and Survival in Amruta Patil's Kari

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Abstract—Ecofeminism is a critical theory that explores the connection between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. It examines how patriarchal systems dominate both women and the environment. *Kari* by Amruta Patil presents a powerful narrative of urban loneliness, love, loss, and survival through the life of Kari, a woman navigating emotional trauma in a polluted metropolitan city. The graphic novel highlights themes of ecological destruction, female identity, social marginalization, and resilience. An attempt is also made to analyze critically how *Kari* being a graphic novel from India, has made use of the possibilities of a graphic novel to discuss a universal theme in the Indian context. Through an ecofeminist lens, Kari's journey reflects the interconnected suffering of women and nature under oppressive structures. This article analyzes how the novel portrays environmental degradation, gender politics, and the struggle for survival. It also examines how women resist oppression and reclaim identity in a hostile urban environment. The study concludes that *Kari* offers a strong ecofeminist critique of modern society by emphasizing the shared experiences of exploitation and survival of both women and nature.

Index Terms—Ecofeminism, Nature, Politics, Survival, Women, Environment, Patriarchy, Urban Ecology, Identity, Resistance.

Ecofeminism emerged in the late twentieth century as a theory connecting feminism and environmentalism. It argues that the same patriarchal ideology responsible for the oppression of women also leads to the exploitation of nature. Ecofeminists believe that women and nature share a historical connection because both are often subjected to domination, control, and exploitation. Ecofeminism described in various ways: as a political ideology, a spiritual affirmation for women, a source of inspiration for activism, a revival of womanist earth wisdom, a

feminist rebellion within radical environmentalism and a re-evaluation of women's connections to place and ecology. The term ecofeminism often promotes strong responses that leads to quick division into "for" or "against" groups. The umbrella term "Ecofeminism" harnesses the energy from the feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, redirecting it towards analyzing and dismantling the methods used to oppress both human and non-human entities under patriarchal influence and subsequently advocating for change. The liberation of women and the natural environment is viewed as deeply interconnected.

Amruta Patil (born 19 April 1979), writer and painter, is the author of graphic novels *Kari* (2008), *Adi Parva: Churning the Ocean* (2012) and *Sauptik: Blood and Flowers* (2016). *Kari* is a tale about friendship, love and death; its eponymous queer heroine steers through Smog City, a magic-realism version of Mumbai. *Kari* has also been published in French and Italian. *Adi Parva* is based on the Mahabharat, the Puraans and the tradition of oral storytellers and its sutradhaar is the river goddess Ganga. It was selected as one of 2012's best graphic novels by comic book historian, Paul Gravett. After *Adi Parva*, Patil returns with more revisionist retelling of epic lore: in *Sauptik*, the Kurukshetra war is long over; Ashwatthama, warrior with the unhealing wound, looks upon the worlds he once knew. The narrative, with lush and playful visuals, is an ecological tale as much as it is a mythological one emphasizing our forgotten connection with the elements, rivers, forests and soil.

Patil worked as a copywriter at Enterprise Nexus (Mumbai) in 1999-2000. She was the Co-founder, Editor of the quarterly magazine, 'Mindfields' (2007-2012). Patil was awarded TED Fellowship in 2009.

She is currently a writer-in-residence at La Maison des Auteurs in Angoulême, France. Amruta Patil is a recipient of India's Nari Shakti Puraskar (2016) for unusual work that breaks boundaries in art and literature. The blending of the timeless and the contemporary replete with innumerable micro-subversions is central to her textual and visual style. Her work sits at an intersection between mythology, ecology and feminism.

Amruta Patil's graphic novel *Kari* presents a vivid portrayal of urban life through striking visuals and poetic narration. It is also treated as a vital text that offers cultural space to discuss themes of gender, sexuality and homophobia. Patil's work also generates a rich narrative that visualizes the many moods of its reclusive protagonist, in a powerful, intertextual way. The heteroglossia, combined with an experimental use of 'ink, marker, charcoal and oilbar, crayon and found images', captures Kari's psychological landscape in all its complexity, creating a unique narrative framed by her interiority. In turn this creates a distinct way of seeing (other characters, places and events) through the eyes of this unusual protagonist. As a text, then situated within two literary movements, the first wave of graphic novels in India, and the more recent feminist traditions, it remains unique through its significant differences.

Kari revolves around Kari, a queer woman living in a metropolitan city filled with pollution, emotional emptiness, and social pressures. The novel begins with Kari surviving a suicide attempt after emotional devastation caused by heartbreak. This survival itself becomes one of the strongest symbolic moments in the narrative. Kari states, "Some people are lucky enough to be saved by the light; no such luck for me. I was saved by a sewer." This quote presents a striking ecofeminist image. Kari is not saved by purity, beauty, or light, but by a sewer a symbol of urban waste, decay, and environmental destruction. Her survival is deeply connected with the polluted environment around her.

Amruta Patil uses the image of a sewer to expose social discrimination based on sexuality. The chapter titled 'The Ark' features an idealized situation of heavy rain which mixes road and sewer. "Fast rain. . . we are happy in here. . . road and sewer are one". Kari anticipates an ideal world where homosexuals will not be treated as the other, where homosexuality

will be considered as 'normal' behaviour. Kari envisages a progressive Indian society that may not treat people with alternative sexual behaviour as 'Sewer' other. This reflects how both women and nature are forced to survive within systems of exploitation and degradation.

Nature in *Kari* is not portrayed as peaceful or nurturing in a traditional sense. Instead, nature appears damaged, polluted, and suffocated by urban expansion. The city becomes a central symbol in the novel, reflecting both ecological destruction and emotional suffering. Kari's world is filled with smoke, waste, smog, and toxic surroundings. The last strip of the second part portrays the gruesome reality of the heavily polluted Smog City: "On my way back home, like on any other day, I try to breathe as little as I can to prevent Smog City from choking me. I wish I could detach my lungs. Every day, the city seems to be getting heavier, and her varicose veins fight to break out of her skin. Soon we must mutate-thick skins and resilient lungs- to survive this new reality" (Kari, 13).

Kari speaks about the need for a social mutation in order to accept the new reality. The polluted city mirrors her internal pain and mental exhaustion. The environmental condition of the city reflects the emotional and psychological state of its inhabitants. Kari's statement, "The city seems to be getting heavier," captures the oppressive atmosphere of urban life. This heaviness symbolizes not only pollution but also the burden of emotional trauma, alienation, and social pressure.

The ecological crisis in the novel reflects ecofeminist concerns about environmental exploitation. Urbanization and industrialization have transformed nature into a space of waste and decay. Kari's survival through a sewer and landfill symbolizes this damaged ecological reality. She says, "I crawled out of the sewer and into a landfill." This image powerfully connects human survival with environmental destruction. Ecofeminism emphasizes that when nature is exploited, human life also suffers. In *Kari*, nature is not a separate entity but a living force deeply connected to human experience. The destruction of the environment directly affects physical and emotional survival.

The novel also explores politics through gender, sexuality, class, and power structures. When Henry comes to their life, a link is established between the

fox and Henry. Thus, the fox stands for the masculine presence that threatens the female bonding. In Kari's ad the princess never reaches the fox: "the further the Princess walked, the further the fox ran". If the fox symbolically stands for masculine presence, then the Princess' inability to meet the fox cancels out the possibility of a heterosexual relationship. She speaks about the Fairy world thus: "Where gold trees with silver boughs bear pomegranates with real ruby seeds. Floors of marble, ceilings of brocade. Place where twelve dancing princesses dance through the night until the soles of their shoes wear out" (Kari, 16).

Perhaps, the bright red ruby seeds alone serve the purpose of contrasting the happiness of the Fairy World with the harsh outer world. Kari's identity as a queer woman makes her existence political.

I, Kari, twice born, who trawl the drains dream after dream, can smell the sewer everywhere. My thoughts keep returning to the city's lower intestine. To the gutters and hastily dug out canals that empty her bladder and swell her arteries with clean blood. (Kari,41).

It is the sewer that connects one part of the city to another, one part of consciousness to another, and is a serpentine space. The inventiveness of this fluid space is highlighted by images of travelling, trawling, traversing communicating a sense of being constantly in motion. The recurrence of these watery images in Patil's text sets the tone for, as well as parallels, the exploration of Kari's identity as a queer woman, as she keeps returning to the sewers over and over again through the text. Kari challenges conventional expectations regarding gender and sexuality. Her life represents resistance against heteronormative and patriarchal systems.

The women in the novel also experience different forms of oppression and struggle for survival within a patriarchal society. Their stories reveal the politics of gender and social inequality. Ecofeminism argues that oppression is interconnected. Gender oppression cannot be separated from environmental exploitation, class inequality, and social marginalization. This idea is strongly reflected in Kari. The city is not only ecologically damaged but also socially unequal. Women in the novel constantly struggle against beauty standards, emotional exploitation, and social expectations. Their bodies and identities become sites

of control. Consumer culture and capitalist values further intensify this oppression.

The corporate world depicted in the novel reflects capitalist politics that prioritize appearance, productivity, and profit over emotional well-being and sustainability. Kari works in an environment shaped by consumer culture, where glamour and appearance are constantly emphasized. Kari's ad consisting of four panels separated by narrow gutters. It portrays a princess with long hair chasing a fox. The ad has a caption that says, "The fox was beautiful, and white as snow. The Princess walked o'er hills and dales to find him. East o' the sun she walked, and west o' the 8 moons. The further the Princess walked, the further the fox ran- always on the horizon" (Kari,12).

The image of the fox can be subjected to multiple interpretations. On the one hand it stands for Kari's creativity that has taken shape on the ad page. She encounters pressures linked to beauty and commercialization. The demand to "Bring in the sexy, bring in the glamour" reflects how women are objectified and reduced to appearances. This illustrates how patriarchy and capitalism work together to control women's bodies and identities.

The women living in Crystal Palace represent another important dimension of the novel. Crystal Palace becomes a symbolic space of female solidarity and shared survival. It functions as a community where women support one another while carrying their individual struggles and pain. Kari refers to it by saying, "Crystal Palace is my chorus." This metaphor suggests collective voices, shared experiences, and emotional support. Moreover, the fact that the Fairy World has no prince, but only 'twelve princesses dancing all the night' equates the happiness of the Fairy World with the absence of men.

In ecofeminism, community, care, and interdependence are important values. Crystal Palace reflects these values through the relationships among women. The women in Crystal Palace come from different backgrounds and carry different histories of trauma and survival. Despite their struggles, they create a space of belonging and solidarity. This collective survival becomes an act of resistance against oppressive systems. The relationships among women challenge patriarchal ideas of isolation and competition. Instead, the novel presents care, empathy, and support as powerful forces of survival.

Survival is one of the most significant themes in *Kari*. The novel begins with trauma and near death but gradually develops into a story of endurance, resilience, and healing. Kari's survival is not limited to physical survival; it is emotional, mental, and social. She survives heartbreak, loneliness, and emotional pain while trying to rebuild her life. This survival reflects ecofeminist ideas of resistance and resilience.

Kari's struggle highlights the human capacity to continue despite suffering. Her survival is deeply connected with her environment and her relationships. She learns to live with pain while finding meaning in community and connection. Survival in the novel is not presented as a simple victory but as a continuous process of struggle and adaptation. Kari's words, "A failed suicide because no one emerges from it unscarred," emphasize the emotional scars of survival. Survival does not erase pain, but it allows healing and transformation. This reflects the ecofeminist understanding that survival involves endurance, adaptation, and collective care.

The environmental crisis in the novel also mirrors survival. Nature continues to survive despite exploitation and destruction. Kari observes the harsh reality of environmental damage and says, "Soon we must mutate thick skins and resilient lungs to survive this new reality." This quote reflects the extreme pressure placed on both humans and nature. Survival requires adaptation in a damaged world. The parallel between Kari and nature strengthens the ecofeminist message of resilience. Kari offers a meaningful critique of modern urban society. It highlights the ecological crisis created by human exploitation and the emotional crisis created by oppressive social systems.

A massive breakup with her lover Ruth who exits at the very beginning of the text leaving Kari in the 'smog city' Bombay by herself marking the journey of self-exploration between Kari's attempted suicide at the beginning of the text and her decision to go on living by its closing. It highlights the ecological crisis created by human exploitation and the emotional crisis created by oppressive social systems. Through Kari's journey, the novel demonstrates that survival itself can become an act of resistance. Kari's resilience reflects the strength of women who continue to survive despite pain, oppression, and environmental destruction.

Thus, *Kari* stands as a powerful ecofeminist text that explores the relationship between nature, politics, and survival. It reminds readers that the exploitation of women and nature are deeply interconnected. At the same time, the novel offers hope through resilience, community, and survival. Kari's journey from trauma to endurance becomes a symbol of resistance in a world shaped by crisis and inequality.

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