ECOFEMINIST READINGS OF SELECT NOVELS BY MARKANDAYA, DESAI AND ROY

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DEDICATION

To Mimo

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

"We are either going to have a future where women lead the way to make peace with the Earth or we are not going to have a human future at all."[1]

Introduction:

Ecofeminism as a critical theory began in the West. The term "Ecofeminism" has been coined by a French critic and the proponent of the theory of Western ecofeminism Francoise d' Eaubonne. In the West the concepts of environment and gender, and how they are related, are investigated on ideological grounds. In India on the other hand, the links between women and ecology can be articulated in practical terms because we have a long history of women's battle against environmental degradation and exploitation. In the Chipko Movement (1970), the Appiko Movement (1983), the Narmada Bachao Andolan (1985) and in numerous other events we see women play a significant role. Women take important positions in these struggles as their lives are intimately connected to nature. In the Indian context theorists as well as literary writers explore many shades of this nature-women connection.

In theory, we find spiritual ecofeminism, cultural ecofeminism and material ecofeminism. Spiritual ecofeminism focuses on regenerating the idea of nature as divine. Spiritual ecofeminists believe that if we can locate this divine "Feminine Principle"[2] within nature or if we can come to understand nature as a sentient spiritual entity we will never be able to harm it. They advocate the regeneration and restoration of nature's spiritual paradigm,

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[1]WomenandMyth, "Environmental Hero Dr. Vandana Shiva to Address ASWM Symposium," ASWM, March 26, 2022, https://womenandmyth.org/2022/02/13/environmental-hero-dr-vandana-shiva-to-address-aswm-symposium/.

[2] Vandana Shiva, "Development, Ecology and Women" in *Ecology: Key Concepts in Critical Theory*, ed. Carolyn Merchant (New York: Humanity Books, 2008), 293.

which is feminine in character. Secondly, some feel that human beings have built this culture-nature duality since the dawn of civilization.[3] Nature is now seen as an obstacle in their quest to establish themselves as a superior. As a result, nature becomes a tool to be manipulated and dominated. Women, on the other hand, are viewed as inferior to men. Their shared history of subjugation is a common thread that binds them together.[4] This is termed as cultural ecofeminism. Material ecofeminism stresses the fact that women's material reality is such that when nature is harmed their lives also are altered.[5] These are the various strands of Indian ecofeminism. In literature, especially by the women authors we further delve into the intricacies of nature-women connections which are sometimes overlooked by the theorists themselves. Issues such as gender, class and race are raised, city life or urbanity is presented with its pros and cons, and most importantly these authors present us with an alternative idea of modernity that does not necessarily subjugate the "other". From these texts by Indian women authors, we realise that it is not possible to define Indian ecofeminism in simple, monolithic terms. Ecofeminism is where complex and diversified interactions between men, women, animals, plants, other living and non-human entities operate. The idea of oneness between all human and non-human things becomes vividly alive when we start to form an essentially Indian ecofeminist theory. The contribution of these women authors in shaping the theory is undeniable. These literary texts which are set in Indian villages from the 1940's to 2000's portray women protagonists of different backgrounds. These texts also reveal how they connect to nature and how all such relationships have evolved with time.

Ecofeminism is a mode of critical thinking that has been developed relatively recently

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[3] Bill Devall, "The Deep Ecology Movement" in *Ecology: Key Concepts in Critical Theory*, ed. by Carolyn Merchant (New York: Humanity Books, 2008), 157.

[4] Vandana Shiva, "Development, Ecology and Women" in *Ecology: Key Concepts in Critical Theory*, ed. Carolyn Merchant (New York: Humanity Books, 2008), 295.

[5] Bina Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own- Gender and Land Rights in South Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

and tries to investigate the myriad ways in which women and the natural world are connected. Historically, both woman and nature have been considered as caring, nurturing, and self-sacrificing entities. Both nature and women as resources have had a long and troubled history of being oppressed. They have been conquered, possessed, dominated and exploited. Ecofeminists believe that the male-patriarchal-capitalist attitude that views both nature and woman as the inferior "other" is the reason for their oppression and exploitation.[6] The contradiction between nature and culture, according to Ynestra King and Carolyn Merchant, is a fallacy and a patriarchal ideological construct. King and Merchant also acquiesce to the viewpoint that women are ideologically formed as being close to nature on account of their biological make-up.[7] Ecofeminism not only points at these dichotomies that are predominant in our lives but also seeks to know from where these dichotomies arise in history. Ecofeminists are confronted with questions during this inquiry, some of which are fundamental and to which they hope to provide solutions. These are:

Why do we see women and nature as connected?

What are the unique ways in which they share a common platform?

How do systems of traditional knowledge create dichotomies?

How does the dominant power structure create the divide between man and nature?

The Source of the Idea of "Man over Nature":

The Enlightenment was an intellectual movement that took place in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. During this period, ideas concerning God, reason, nature, and humanity were synthesised into a worldview. This worldview received widespread approval in the

[6] Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2010), 17.

[7] Bina Agarwal, "The Gender and Environment Debate: Lessons from India," *Feminist Studies* 18, no.1 (Spring 1992): 121,www.jstor.org/stable/ 3178217.

Western world and was the impetus for revolutionary changes in art, philosophy, and politics. Reason, the faculty by which humans comprehend the cosmos, was honoured and utilised as a central tenet of Enlightenment thinking. Reason was accorded the power that allowed humanity to make progress in both their understanding of the universe and their own.[8] It was believed that the purposes of rational mankind were to be in the pursuit of knowledge, freedom, and happiness. The modern Western world and many of its primary theories and philosophical treaties have emerged out of the Enlightenment movement which speaks of uniformity, and universality, and aims to constitute a definite world order where there would be no place for multiple cultural spaces, faiths and religions. The enlightenment mentality placed primary emphasis on the capacity of human intelligence to comprehend and make sense of the natural world, as well as the ability to identify natural explanations for phenomena that were formerly attributed to supernatural causes.[9] For instance, there were a lot of attempts made to explain away the so-called 'miracles' that were described in the Bible. This is because breaking the rules of nature, which is what a miracle is supposed to do, is both a logical impossibility and a contradiction in terms. When declaring that there was no need to look beyond the physical world of nature to the spiritual, in order to explain human behaviour, the Enlightenment thinkers were appealing to an established Enlightenment mentality. They believed that there was no need to look beyond the physical world of nature. The idea that human beings can be understood entirely as products of their natural environments was already widely held before Hume popularised it. Landscape painters and garden designers strove to trim, beautify, and frame nature in ways that highlighted the human capacity to manage it. During the Enlightenment science and technology aspired to open up to examination and harness the power of all areas of the natural world. Instead of

[8] Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2010), 12.

[9] Shiva, Staying *Alive*, 228.

being recognised as a force or attraction in its own right, nature was thought of more as a subject worthy of inquiry. Within such a system of thought humans come to regard itself as a separate, autonomous entity entirely different from nature. The whole aim of the growth and development of society was to gain control over nature and everyone else was considered inferior, including the land and the people that they began to conquer. Adorno and Horkheimer in their essay *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002) write:

> Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumph calamity. Enlightenment program was the disenchantment of the world... The 'happy match' between human understanding and the nature of things that he (Francis Bacon) envisaged is a patriarchal one: the mind conquering superstitions is to rule over disenchanted nature. Knowledge, which is power, knows no limit, either in its enslavement of creation or in its defence of worldly masters.[10]

Thus in his attempt to rid himself of the fear of nature which stems from ignorance man conquers nature, starts to dominate it, and projects himself as independent from it. The dualism of culture and nature begins to emerge from this split between master (man) and slave (nature). In our quest for more development and advancement, we have begun to regard nature as inert, as a resource that must be used in order to advance. A dominant system of world order emerges, one that defines a clear concept of progress and growth. This concept is primarily a product of Western capitalism.[11]

Marx in his idea of 'nature', 'man' and the relationship between them states that "Nature is man's Body on which he lives."[12] Marx relates nature to man in two ways: 1. Nature is a direct means of man's life. 2. The material as well as the instrument of man's life-activity. Man, according to Marx, needs to be in continuous interchange with nature if he has

[10] Max, Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Guenzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 22.

[11] Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies, *Ecofeminism* (New Delhi: Rawat Publication, 2010).

[12] Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscript of 1844*, ed. Dirk J. Struik, trans. Martin Milligan (New York: International Publishers, 1964), 112.

to survive. Nature becomes his 'inorganic body' as he lives on it. Man's physical as well as spiritual life depends on nature as man himself is part of nature. Marx points out that the first deviation from this interdependence of man and nature comes from Francis Bacon, the father of materialism and founder of modern experimental sciences. Bacon believed that natural science is the only real science and that an understanding of the natural world that is grounded in physics is the most important component of natural science. Francis Bacon, one of the chief figures of the European Enlightenment argues over the scope of scientific knowledge which is based upon reasoning and careful observation of events in nature. This approach makes nature a human subject to understand scientifically.[13] It becomes an object of scientific observation. Man looks at it with the intent of examining its functioning in order to make it into a resource to be exploited. Modernism aspires to conquer nature because it sees nature as a challenge to man's dominance over the globe. As a result, modernism separates man from nature. It distinguishes the two and elevates one over the other. This approach can be traced back to Christian spiritual tradition as well. The book of Genesis, which tells the tale of man's creation, also supports the idea that man has the right to use nature for his benefit. God created man on the sixth day of creation and proclaimed its superiority over all of his previous creations. It says: Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it: and have domination over the fish in the sea and over the birds of the air and over everything that moves upon this earth. (Genesis, 1:28)[14]

Francis Bacon taking his motivation from the biblical story further advocates man's right of exploiting nature. This time it happens in the field of the "new sciences" in the 16th century. He writes in *Novum Organon*: "Let the human race recover that right over nature

[13] Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution (*San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1990), 33, 112.

[14] Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution (*San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1990), 146.

which belongs to man by divine bequest... nature is a fecundity waiting to be unfolded, but does not any longer unfold itself. It requires the intervention of man to do so."[15] Thus in Western thought nature is silent, inert, and passive and needs the aid of man to become useful for humanity. The idea of 'nature' as an object or matter emerges from this. This shift in perception of 'nature' and our relationship to it gives rise to as Marx puts it: "the germ of all round development."[16]

What distinguishes man's relationship with nature from the relationship of other animals with it is man's capability to use nature as a resource. Man could use his wits, hands, and other instruments to work in nature and manufacture things for himself. Man's natural productivity provides him with a means of subsistence. As a result, man employs nature in the production of his material life. When the material component of man's productivity is taken into account, man's connection with nature begins to shift. Nature has become an object of exploitation thanks to contemporary science, and materiality has turned it into a source of profit. Engels says, "Man alone has succeeded in impressing his stamp on nature, not only by so altering the aspect and climate of his dwelling place, and even the plants and animals themselves, that the consequence of his activity can disappear only with the general extinction of the terrestrial globe."[17]

The Enlightenment project seems at the beginning as a promise for a better future, a better world. Yet despite encompassing such lofty ideals the project of Enlightenment fails as it refuses to accept the diversity of cultures around the world. Western Enlightenment gives birth to an idea of modernity that is narrow and exploitative. The West has propagated an

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[15] Sir Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, ed. Joseph Devey, M.A. (New York: P.F. Collier, 1902), https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/bacon-novum-organum. accessed on 6.3.20.

[16] Carolyn Merchant, "Marx and Engels on Ecology," in *Ecology*, ed. Howard L. Parsons (New York: Humanity Books, 2008), 46.

[17] Friedrich Engels, *Dialectics of Nature* (New York.: International Publishers, 1954), 47.

idea of modernity as supreme, fixed and acceptable. What results is a form of cultural domination of one community over the rest of the world. On the other hand, man begins to see nature as an object of scientific enquiry. Science and reason have helped man in the domination of nature. Man begins to separate himself from nature. Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859) further alienates man from non-human nature. Engels identified the flaw in the Darwinian idea of "The Struggle for Life". Before the theory of struggle came up we perceived human and non-human nature existing in harmony. Engels believed that it is, in fact, a process of harmony and collision, cooperation and struggle that sustained life in nature. But the theory of "struggle for life" left aside essential aspects of nature and the connection of man with it: harmony, interdependence, and balance.[18]

Marx believed that the development of societies from the primitive stage to a class divided and then to a capitalist society transformed man's relationship with nature. In capitalist societies, the relationship between human and non-human nature is determined by the ruling class. According to Marx and Engels, the "relation of capitalists to nature is marked by exploitation, pollution and ruination."[19] They observed that the capitalists had transformed the earth or nature into an "object of huckstering"[20], a profitable substance. This aspect of individual profit achieved via exploitation has transformed man's initial unity with nature into a relationship based on control and dominance of nature. This has had unintended and negative repercussions. One of the consequences, they felt, is the ever-mounting amount of waste that man creates. In nature, nothing is called waste. Everything is renewable in nature. Only man is capable of creating harmful, non-renewable waste that pollutes the land,

[18] Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, 320.

[19] Merchant, *Ecology*, 53.

[20] Merchant, *Ecology*, 53.

the water and the air.

Such capitalist forces when enter the field of agriculture as a modern industry the first thing it does is that it removes the peasant with wage labourer. The work in the field and inside the factory is now run by the same policies. The profit-oriented capitalist system now looks for capital and profit from the production of agricultural land.[21] Marx writes: "The irrational, old-fashioned methods of agriculture are replaced by scientific ones. Capitalist production completely tears asunder the old bond of union which held together agriculture and manufacture in their infancy." [22] According to Marx, the upshot of this transformation is several different catastrophes. To begin, it interferes with the ability of the soil to maintain its fertility over an extended period of time. Second, it has a negative impact on the health of the labourer. Third, it results in the enslavement and exploitation of the labourers. To continue, it results in the production of hazardous waste. In this way, when agriculture transforms into industrial farming with the assistance of science and works toward the so-called development of a country, it usually results in the destruction of both the natural world and the lives of its inhabitants. Marx thought that the more a nation works toward economic development with the assistance of science and technology, the more rapidly the natural world is deteriorating as a result.[23]

Herbert Marcuse in his essay *Ecology and Revolution* (2007) links 'genocide' with 'ecocide'. The war against people and the war against nature are for him linked. The link he describes as: "It is no longer enough to do away with people living now, life must also be denied to those who aren't even born yet by burning and poisoning the earth, defoliating the forests, blowing up the dikes. This bloody insanity will not alter the ultimate course of the

[21] Shiva, *Staying Alive*, 27.

[22] Merchant, *Ecology*, 54.

[23] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (Vol.1), ed. Friedrich Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: International Publishers,1967).

war, but it is a very clear expression of where contemporary homeland goes hand in hand with the cruel waste of destructive forces and consumption of commodities of death manufactured by the war industry."[24] Capitalism, Marcuse thinks wages war against both human and non-human nature. The way Marcuse and other theorists like Marx, Engels, Adorno and Horkheimer link capitalism and the destruction of nature it becomes abundantly clear that modernity that gives rise to the capitalist system is to be blamed for the damage done to non-human nature and the lives of those people who share a close bond with it. Marcuse believes that capitalism demands the exploitation of nature. As much as the demand increases there arises a conflict between nature and its well-being with that of the profit-oriented industry of capitalism. Extreme exploitation then reduces and exhausts the resources of nature. Man's survival in nature indeed demands a certain amount of use of natural resources. But there lies another dimension to the relationship that man shares with nature. Civilization serves a number of functions amongst which one is to 'civilize' man by changing his inner nature and his relationship with external nature. Man's survival in nature demands labour and labour gives rise to production. Nature in capitalist order becomes a resource yet Marcuse believes that it also stands for beauty and order. Women's work in nature rarely intervenes with the inherent order of natural systems. It is the ever-growing material demand that harms the unity and harmony in nature.

Ecofeminism, a Reaction against the Dominant Power Structure:

Ecofeminism is a reaction to the patriarchal capitalist system that necessarily entails the subjugation of nature, women and the marginal entities of the human and non-human world. Many sceptics of Ecofeminism have posed the question, why do ecofeminism's proponents believe that feminism as a philosophy is insufficient to address issues raised by the current,

[24] Herbert Marcuse, "Ecology and Revolution", in *Ecology*, ed. Carolyn Merchant (New York: Humanity Books, 2007), 67.

exploitative global system? Ecofeminists, on the other hand, have remained steadfast in their convictions. The theoretical point of view takes a quite different approach to the question of women's emancipation and liberty, and this is where the most significant divergence may be found. Ecofeminism wants us to realise that women's liberation is not possible within the context of the existing systems that are controlled by dominant power equations.[25] They recognise the system as 'Capitalist Patriarchy'. Capitalist Patriarchy causes the deteriorating conditions of women, particularly of rural women. In addition to this, it contributes to the deterioration of the natural world. One cannot deny the existence of an unmistakable correlation between the plundering of the natural world and the steadily deteriorating position of women in contemporary society.[26] Ecofeminists argue that women are more susceptible to the negative effects of environmental catastrophes than males are. In order to fulfil their roles in the household, women often engage in activities that bring them into intimate contact with nature. She is the one in charge of gathering food, fuel, and clean water.[27] She must also be the custodian of the natural world if she is to have any chance of gaining access to these natural resources. If she is prevented from obtaining these resources, the people who will suffer the most will be her children and herself. Men, on the other hand, have access to land and are able to participate in development projects. Men invest in their families, but women's roles are significantly more important for the sustenance of children and the family's survival. Men are more likely than women to spend a considerable portion of their daily earnings on things like cigarettes and alcohol. The local economy is likewise heavily reliant on women and their labour in the fields. She looks after the garden and assists in the production of fruits and vegetables. Although these works are modest in scale, they have a significant impact on

[25] Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution (*San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1990), 316.

[26] Bina Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own- Gender and Land Rights in South Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 60.

[27] Shiva, *Staying Alive*, 138.

the lives of women. These fruits and vegetables are subsequently sold to local markets, where things are generally sold by individuals. Women's empowerment is aided by such local economies since they can obtain money for herself and her children. As a result, when nature is harmed or ecologies are disrupted, women bear the brunt of the consequences. The link between environmental degradation and worsening conditions on women is a reality, particularly in the Third World, where Western development principles were implemented shortly after India's independence. Western development theories are founded on science, which is followed by technology. Science and technology, as previously said, are based on reason and are a weapon of dominance over the natural world.

This situation in the Third World, as well as the rest of the world, fosters a sense of togetherness and solidarity among women of all races, classes, ethnicities, and nationalities. The demand for solidarity, for the preservation of nature, which includes both living and non-living creatures, has the potential to bring nations that have always been at odds together. In their book, *Ecofeminism* (2010), Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva explain how these shared concerns of women around the world have led to activism against environmental destruction. These protests may be small in scale, but they are hugely crucial when it comes to women's participation in environmental preservation. In his work, *The Domination of Nature* (2008), William Leiss shows how dominance over nature invariably leads to nature's uprising. In this context, he discusses Max Horkheimer and his book *The Eclipse of Reason* (1947). He defines the uprising as follows: “The revolt of nature means the rebellion of human nature which takes place in the form of violent outbreaks of persistently repressed instinctual demands. As such it is of course not at all unique to modem history, but is rather a recurrent feature of human civilization.”[28]

[28] William Leiss, “The Domination of Nature,” in *Ecology*, ed. Carolyn Merchant (New York: Humanity Books, 2008),77.

When it comes to the uprisings or protests led by women for the sake of preserving nature, this has been the reality that has played out. There are countless cases of women playing a key role in the initiation of such protests. Protests in an atomic power plant in Germany, demonstrations against mining in the Himalayas, demonstrations against deforestation in India (Chipko Andolan), the Green Belt movement in Kenya, a movement against food pollution and the use of chemicals in Japan, demonstrations against the destruction of mangrove forests in Ecuador, and a great number of other protests taking place all over the world.[29] What makes ecofeminism stand out from other theories is the fact that it originated from the social protests and activity of women who do not necessarily have a scholarly background but who have a strong connection to nature. Women have a deep connection to the earth, the natural world, and their communities, and they are acutely aware of the perils that may befall them and their families if the ecological balance and natural harmony are disrupted. These protests by women can unquestionably serve as the testimony to support the contention that there is a complex connection between women and the natural world. Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to assert that all women have a strong connection to the natural world. In their article, Mies and Shiva discuss how a woman's interaction with the environment in a rural setting is very different from a woman's interaction with nature in an urban setting. They write: "Some women, however, particularly urban, middle-class women, find it difficult to perceive commonality both between their liberation and the liberation of nature, and between themselves and 'different' women in the world."[30]

There is in fact a reason as to why women who live in metropolitan areas react differently or do not react at all to the natural degradation. Women who are members of more privileged socioeconomic classes frequently have access to the pleasures that are made

[29] Brian Tokar "Global Ecological Movements," in *Ecology*, ed. Carolyn Merchant (New York: Humanity Books, 2008), 109.

[30] Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (New Delhi: Rawat Publication, 2010), 5.

possible by the exploitation of natural resources. Second, the lives of these women do not immediately depend on the natural world in the same way as the lives of rural women do. The female authors whose works have been addressed in this thesis have exhibited a variation in the conception of how various women of different social strata respond to nature. They have found that there are urban-dwelling women who are aware of the effects of environmental exploitation and who understand the value of conserving the harmony found in nature. Women in different social situations indeed have varying responses to nature, but it is not true that urban women do not have any kind of strong reaction to the natural world in general.

Regardless of the women's responses towards natural degradation, one thing is clearly evident: women and the natural world have a link, and the fight for ecological justice and feminist movements have a similar platform. For Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies ecological issues are gender issues. Concerns shared by feminists include the annihilation of fragile ecologies all over the world caused by multinational corporations and the looming possibility of nuclear war caused by major military powers. The connection can be traced back to the masculinist way of thinking. The kind of thinking that promotes the dominance of women also justifies the abuse of nature. At the same time it denies a woman the freedom to make decisions about her own body and sexuality. Capitalist patriarchy is blind to the fact that the natural world contains living bodies. State authority and economic domination are two of the primary tools that the capitalist patriarchy uses to control the world. In the article "Reduction and Regeneration: A Crisis in Science" Vandana Shiva states the following: "Third World and feminist scholarship has begun to recognize that the dominant system emerged as a liberating force not for humanity as a whole (though it legitimized itself in terms of universal benefit for all), but as a Western male-oriented and patriarchal projection which necessarily

entailed the subjugation of both nature and women."[31] The natural world and all of the life forms that can be found within it also start to lose its enchantment. When nature is violated, it affects everyone, but the women, children, animals, and plants are the ones who sustain the most damage. We no longer view the natural world as a living organism, and we fail to recognise that we are an integral part of it.

In many ways, ecofeminism is a reaction to Western conceptions of progress and what the West defines as knowledge. Ecofeminism thinks that all are one, and it challenges self-and-other dualisms. It also strives to keep the aspects of magic inside nature intact by considering nature as sacrosanct. Western ecofeminists such as Francoise d' Eaubonne, a prominent French critic and proponent of the theory of Western ecofeminism, Hazel Handerson, an American activist and writer, Starhawk, a British critic, and Indian activist Vandana Shiva all agree that nature is sacred, which is why they see Eastern cultures as being opposed to Western cultures that see nature as a resource. These ecofeminists have come together in order to place renewed emphasis on the underlying spirituality that is connected to nature: Hazel Henderson thinks that ecofeminism is responsible for the revival of more traditional societies that worship nature and are predominately matriarchal in structure. In addition to this, she believes that the natural world and all of its workings are not entirely understandable. Because humans are an essential component of the order, it is impossible for them to comprehend how the natural world functions because of their presence.[32] Starhawk characterises the concept of worshipping a goddess as a component of spiritual ecofeminism. She emphasises on the goddess tradition, nature theology, and indigenous spirituality in her explanation. These theorists think that the concept of the earth as a living organism will

[31] Vandana Shiva, "Reduction and Regeneration: A Crisis in Science", in *Ecofeminism*, ed. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (New Delhi: Rawat Publication, 2010), 22.

[32] Lindsy Van Gelder, "It's Not Nice to Mess with Mother Nature: Ecofeminism 101 (Jan/Feb 1989)," Ms. Magazine, March 15, 2023, https://msmagazine.com/2023/03/15/mother-nature-ecofeminism/.

inspire people to take action to protect it. The natural world is revered in these cultures as a Goddess.[33] Indigenous spirituality and nature theologies are given prominence in spiritual ecofeminism. By accepting the elements of divinity in nature the spiritual ecofeminist aims to do one thing: saving nature. Nature is revered as a Goddess in Eastern cultures, and the world has been depicted as having a female soul in Western philosophies.

Ecofeminism and its Many Branches:

Spiritual Ecofeminism believes that there exists an interconnection with every element of nature. All are part of the same principle. This idea of an interconnection itself is spiritual in essence. Vandana Shiva in her book *Ecofeminism* (2010) writes: "Although the spirit was female, it was not apart from the material world, but seen as the life-force in everything and in every human being: it was indeed the connecting principle."[34] Many civilizations around the world recognise the spiritual aspect of the woman-nature link as real and vital. In another of Vandana Shiva's books, *Staying Alive* (2010) she discusses how in India, the spiritual relationship between women and the environment has been embraced without question. In India, she believes, women are an integral part of nature. Nature epitomises the female principle on the one hand, while the woman is fostered by the same feminine essence to nourish life and offer sustenance on the other.

Vijaya Rettakundi Nagarajan, in her article "Soil as the Goddess Bhudevi in a Tamil Women's Ritual: The Kolam in India" shares a similar view with the spiritual ecofeminists of both Western and non-Western background. She tries to explain many Indian women's rituals, which are regarded to be part of their religion (mainly Hindu religion), as

[33] KCBX |By Elizabeth Barrett, "The Reluctant Therapist: Starhawk on Ecofeminism and Connecting Spiritually with the Earth," KCBX, March 10, 2021, https://www.kcbx.org/environment/2021-03-09/the-reluctant-therapist-starhawk-on-ecofeminism-and-connecting-spiritually-with-the-earth.

[34] Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (New Delhi: Rawat Publication, 2007), 17.

representations of nature's natural sense of sanctity in her article. This is a form of reverence for the natural world. She refers to these rituals as "embedded ecologies," which are religious in origin and grow as a part of culture. She emphasises the aspect of 'sacrality' in nature, demonstrating how a sense of obligation to conserve and maintain nature can arise from a supposed sanctity inside natural objects or nature itself.[35] She writes:

> underlying our thought and understanding of religion and environment is the proposition that "sacrality" when attached to a natural object makes that object a bounded religiously endowed entity and that object is automatically, therefore assumed to become more protected. The 'sacrality' itself creates a context a context where people surrounding that natural object are more careful, more resource conscious, and more ecologically sensitive to the consequences of using that natural resource.[36]

The spiritual component of the link between women and nature, which has been acknowledged in a wide variety of cultures all over the world, has lost some of its significance as a result of the rise of modernity. The idea that man should win over nature is central to modernity, which evolved out of the European Enlightenment. This mastery of nature by man is what has come to be understood as the definition of "modern man". Accepting man's dominance over nature is essential in establishing man's supremacy over the rest of the planet. When man sets out to subdue nature, he frequently forgets that he is a component of the natural world. In order to prevail over nature, rule it, and exploit it, modern man must first detach himself from it. It becomes an impediment to his victory over nature because of his reliance on it and his emotional connection to it. Maria Mies writes: "this dependence was an outrage, a mockery of man's right to freedom on his own terms and therefore had forcefully and violently to be achieved."[37]

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[35] Vijaya Nagarajan, "Soli as the Goddess Bhudevi in a Tamil Hindu Women Ritual: The Kolam of India," in *Women as Sacred Custodians of the Earth. Women Spirituality and the Environment*, ed. Alaine Low and Soraya Tremayne (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 162.

[36] Nagarajan, *Women as Sacred Custodians*, 162.

[37] Mies and Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, 18.

When we talk about connectedness in the context of India we have to mention another perspective of ecofeminism and that is more material than spiritual. Many argue that spiritual ecofeminism has the risk of being essentialist; instead of dismantling the existing power equations, it can reassert the stereotypical gender equations and roles. Vijaya Rettakudi Nagarajan is critical of Shiva's understanding of the sacred connection between nature and women. She is critical of Shiva's ideas of "ecological virtueness" that Indian women naturally have as they water Tulsi plant every day or follow similar rituals that involve elements of nature. She feels that it is also left unexplained in Shiva's argument that how following a ritual can make one aware of and active towards ecological conservation. Bina Agarwal's 'Feminist Environmentalism' perspective follows a similar route. She is also critical of spiritual ecofeminism and advocates material ecofeminism. She concerns herself with the social positioning of women and nature. She argues that as marginalized entities both share a common ground. It is not a sacred thread that binds them together but rather the material reality that connects them. This relationship depends on materiality, material production and distribution and that's why it is variable. In addition, it would be an exaggeration to claim that the outcome of this link is invariably favourable. Bina Agarwal refuses to uncritically accept the notion that women and nature are intrinsically linked. When discussing ecofeminism in India, it is important to take into account the following political and social issues: "What is women's relationship with the environment? Is it distinct from that of man? An intensifying struggle for survival in the developing world, however, highlights the material basis for this link and sets the background for an alternative formulation to ecofeminism, which I term 'feminist environmentalism.' " [38]

[38]Bina Agarwal, "The Gender and Environment Debate: Lessons from India," *Feminist Studies* 18, no.1 (Spring 1992): 199,www.jstor.org/stable/ 3178217.

Bina Agarwal refuses to consider any separate and unique bond between woman and nature. She voices her views in another important work "A Field of One's Own- Gender and Land Rights in South Asia": "Women's concern with environmental protection in movements such as Chipko needs to be sought not in some biological connection between women and nature, but in the prevailing gender division of labour, which makes hill women primarily responsible for fetching fuel-wood, fodder, and water."[39] Shiva, like other ecofeminist theorists, blames the Western civilization for a false construction of nature, one that perceives nature as inert, docile, uniform, and inferior, and so a subject of dominance. Due to such false construction where nature and women are subordinate to man thus equates nature and women. This is a direct effect of what Shiva refers to as 'maldevelopment' in the Western growth model. The imposition of Western concepts of development and advancement on others causes this maldevelopment. Shiva writes "maldevelopment is the death of feminine principle". She shows that the common ground of being inferior shared by both nature and women is the result of the devaluation of what is being provided by both nature and women. They devalue what satisfies a need and ensures sustenance. Ecofeminists such as Shiva and Mies are critical of industrialization as a strategy for development. Shiva feels that it is necessary to re-establish the notion of the feminine principle in nature, the revival of *Prakriti*, the source of all life. This idea of *Prakriti*, the nature Goddess is the preserver and sustainer of every element in nature: animals, plants even the inanimate. Thus women's struggle for liberation necessarily entails a struggle for the preservation of all life forms on this planet. In the traditions of India, nature is seen as *Prakrit*, the manifestation of the female principle. Nature or *Prakriti* is conceived as the active force without which creation is impossible. It is the union of *Prakriti* and *Purusha*, the masculine principle that creates life. Alain Danielou, a French Historian writes: "Every aspect of the cosmos or the cosmic consciousness has thus to

[39] Bina Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 38.

be represented in a dual form; hence every God is shown as having a consort or energy inseparable from himself. The Immensity is coupled with illusion, the power-of-disintegration (Siva) with energy (Sakti), the power-of-cohesion (Visnu) with multiplicity (Laksmi), the power-of-creation (Brahma) with knowledge (Sarasvati)."[40]

Without *Prakriti, Purusha* is inert. In India, women, particularly village women, regard nature as a sacred Goddess. *Prakriti* is venerated as the primordial power, the source of all abundance. That divine principle is present in every element of nature. Animals and plants, as well as rocks, rivers, and mountains, are seen as divine manifestations. The creator, the creator's source, and the created are all one and the same. This idea of the underlying divinity of existence in nature is emphasised in traditional scriptures. Vandana Shiva uses the *Kalika Purana* to demonstrate how different parts of nature are portrayed as basically one in ancient writings: "Rivers and mountains have a dual nature. A river is but a form of water, yet it has a distinct body. Mountains appear as a motionless mass, yet their true form is not such. There dwells a hidden consciousness. Rivers and mountains take the form they wish."[41]

In Indian culture, nature is not seen as a resource but rather as an entity with divine origins; this is how nature has been viewed throughout history. The idea that nature is a "resource" in the Western world creates a division. *Prakriti* and *Purusha* are dichotomies that coexist inside the Indian idea of 'unity'. When it comes to the creative process, they cannot be separated from one another. However, dualities emerge almost immediately once people start looking at nature as something that could be studied and tested. There is a perception that man is distinct from nature. The natural world is regarded as a resource that can be utilised. The Western world tends to have a perspective of nature that is immobile and unresponsive, static and mechanical, distinct from humans, and lower in value. Because of

[40] Alain Danielou, *The Myths and Gods of India* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions Internationals, 1991) 35.

[41] Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2010), 39.

this, it is relatively simple for Western nations to destroy natural environments in order to carry out what are known as "developmental projects." The period of British colonial rule in India pave the way for the Western ideals of progress and modernization to make their way into the collective psyche of this country. We have started acknowledging that Western ideas are essential to our progress as a culture.

Ecofeminism and the Development Model:

The concept of a "happy life" that has been offered by the dominant paradigm of development is something that has been taken from the Western world. Almost immediately after independence, India began moving in the direction of accepting the Western model of development, which Shiva refers to as "catching up development". The rapid implementation of such a developmental model shortly after independence demonstrates the pressing need to create a new India that is a developing nation on an equal level with other developing nations around the world. However, the question that still has to be answered is whether or not such a model of development has been successful in delivering a "good life" to all Indians. The answer to this inquiry is a straightforward and uncomplicated ‘no’. It does not provide a desired existence for anyone. And, in the process of creating a new and better India, traditional sustainable living practises are lost. Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha criticise Indian leaders' policies following the country's independence. Their observation of a nation's shift from agriculture to industry as a necessary step toward growth is useful in understanding how India began to adopt Western development ideals and changed the concept of nature. Following independence, the leaders were confronted with a slew of problems. Gadgil and Guha observe: “The solution obviously lay in industrialisation; in tapping the energy of coal and petroleum of hydroelectric power, in producing steel and

cement and using the resources so generated to promote manufacture."[42]

The urban-industrial sector and the rural land-owning elite both benefit from this approach. Gadgil and Guha argue that such a paradigm is incompatible with Gandhi's proposals. Gandhi aspired to create an agrarian society based on village republics, which would use less natural resources and, as a result, would be able to stop environmental exploitation. Unlike the previous paradigm, which benefited largely the elites and urban society, the Gandhian model is more people-centric. Guha further points out that, while a Gandhian model would appeal to the majority of India's population, the masses would be powerless to influence parliamentary democracy. As a result, a social order forms that stays oblivious to natural resource exploitation. The adoption of the Western concept of development has resulted in rising poverty, malnutrition among vast populations, famine, and death. Clearly, the "catching-up development" approach is doomed to fail. The primary issue with such a development paradigm is that it promotes profit-driven industrial sectors that invariably harm the environment. A small percentage of the population benefits from the profits, while the rest of the population suffers. These disadvantaged people lose the profits while also losing ownership of the forests, lands, and water bodies that have previously provided them with sustenance. These are the people who have been the most adversely affected by the current developmental approach. Children and women are the most affected within the worst-affected group. The equation between necessity-demand-supply is also affected as the rural economic process is replaced by large-scale economies. As a result, the self-sustaining mechanisms that poor people rely on would be unable to cope with any natural or man-made crisis. With the support of the village's small-scale economy, the women used to provide food, fuel, and nutrition. And if that is destroyed, there is no way left to survive.

[42] Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *Ecology and Equity- The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India* (New York: Routledge,1995), 13.

Vandana Shiva compares the situation with that of Titanic, a ship many believed as unsinkable: “Like the Titanic, the global economy has too many locked gates, segregated decks and policies ensuring that women and children will be first-not to be saved, but to fall into the abyss of poverty.” [43]

Development that is shaped by capitalism works much like colonialism. In fact, capitalism is finishing the task started by the colonisers: exploitation of the resources and the people. The land is viewed as a valuable asset that can be utilised for 'development' by capitalism. It ignores the fact that land is more than just a resource to be exploited; many people's livelihoods are dependent on it. These are the indigenous people who have lived on the land for thousands of years. Their lives have grown inextricably linked to the land. When they are torn from their homelands, however, nothing can give them hope for a better life. No amount of rehabilitation will suffice because the land is more than simply a piece of land; it is sacred to them.

And then there is the West's practise of routinely exploiting the Third World to seize control of its market. The lives of people, particularly women and children, are thrown into disarray as a result of these business strategies. These children and the women are completely reliant on the land for their survival. The industries influence both the economy and the competitive strategies of the market. In this case, we need to have an understanding of how the new economy does that in order to profit from the market; but, inside these systems, the disadvantaged villagers and farmers continue to be denied access to better means of subsistence. Chhaya Datar in her book *Ecofeminism Revisited* (2011) writes:

> Global markets allow the interior of the Third World to produce for the market and enter the cash economy. However, these people lack bargaining power and thus earn lesser. The terms of trade (i.e., the price at which poor countries sell to buy from the rich) are pitted against the poor. Rich countries form a “buyers’ market” to dictate

[43] Mies and Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, 70.

> prices. Even though poor people form the majority they do not enjoy absolute control over their products.
>
> The productivity of the Third World has been moulded to suit the demands of developed countries...It promises modern amenities but destroys their self-sufficiency. Development dismantles and disintegrates while promising to reconstitute – a hollow assurance which is never realized in the Third World.[44]

A very similar standpoint has been taken by Vandana Shiva when she compares the 'economic growth' with a machine that drains the resources away from those people who need these resources for their survival.[45] Previously the draining was done by the colonisers but in a new India the work is done by the Governments, national elites who mastermind the exploitation of the poor people. The weapon they use is that of technology.

Ecofeminism- Feminism- Environmentalism:

All of these theoretical methods demonstrate that ecofeminism is a growing critical thinking that we must adapt to perceive and grasp the subtle power politics that are being played out all around us. When we discuss ecofeminism in Third World nations like India, a quite different picture emerges. India is a land of contrasts, including cultural, economic, religious, and propaganda differences. As a result, measuring or defining Indian ecofeminism from a fixed theoretical point of view that speaks of the Third World, in general, becomes challenging. Not only has ecofeminism given feminism a new direction by reframing the concept of 'equality' and 'emancipation', but it also aims to deconstruct the current power system. For ecofeminists, equality is not emancipation. They explain it this way: man has demonstrated with the power of reason and reasoning, the very weapons of enlightenment, that liberation can only be achieved by mastering nature, by being free from nature; progress can only be achieved by using and exploiting nature. This is never called into question by

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[44] Chhaya Datar, *Ecofeminism Revisited* (New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2011), 66.

[45] Mies and Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, 74.

feminism; rather, it insists on equal power to dominate, which is where the problem lies. Within the framework of the paradigms that are currently in place, the concept of "catching up" with the men in this extremely power-dominated society will help to strengthen the grips of deceptive, manipulative development processes. There won't be any changes made to the system. I quote from *Ecofeminism* by Shiva and Mies: “So the question is can the concept of emancipation be compatible with a concept of preserving the earth as our life base?”[46]

The objective of ecofeminism is not to equate equality to emancipation but to seek emancipation of all through preservation. True emancipation does not lie in having equal rights in an already existing order rather it lies in a change of that order which sees nature as inferior to culture and woman to man, animals to humans. Ecofeminism thus can be defined as more liberal, open and welcoming than other more rigid theories like Feminism and Environmentalism. Feminism, points Cathleen McGuire and Colleen McGuire, disappoints as it fails to incorporate within its corpus a criticism about the politics of diversity and to recognise the connections between many different forms of struggle that include issues of gender as well as Environmental justice. They further point out that “many mainstream feminists advocate women’s equal right to participate in all levels of military operations. In contrast, ecofeminism opposed any association with a war machine that unleash terror and death on civilians and a hellish assault on nature.”[47] Ecofeminists differ from Environmentalists as well. They think: “Many Environmentalists disappoint as with their desultory development of a race, class and gender politics. Similarly, those in other progressive groups often demonstrate an inability or an unwillingness to make connections

[46] Mies and Shiva. *Ecofeminism,* 7.

[47] Cathleen McGuire and Colleen McGuire, “Grass-Roots Ecofeminism: Activating Utopia,” in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy,* ed. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (Chicago: University of Illinois Press,1998), 187.

between struggles- a hallmark of ecofeminism."[48]

Ecofeminism originates from a concern for the entire ecosystem; its fundamental principles are centred on the environment. The main difference between ecofeminism and environmentalism is that ecofeminism acknowledges that the deterioration of the natural environment has a negative impact on the lives of all marginal creatures. It has also recognised that issues pertaining to women cannot be addressed in isolation; rather, there is a profound connection between them and concerns related to the environment. Environmentalism or the "Green Movement" of recent times, Janis Birkeland thinks as "masculinist and mainstream".[49] He explains mainstream Green thought is fundamentally gender-blind. It holds on to the very androcentric ideas that influence both green analysis and green strategy. Ecofeminism has also raised questions about the use of technology in solving environmental problems. Spiritual ecofeminism specifically rejects the idea that environmental problems can be solved scientifically, objectively and rationally. Ecofeminists propagate that nature is not a machine separate from ourselves. We are a part of nature and thereby more intuitive and spiritual approach is required when we attempt to preserve nature.

Ecofeminism and Indian English Literature:

These theoretical methods help us understand what ecofeminism is and how it fits into the Third World's context. However, in order to get a full picture of women's relationships with nature, we need to dig a little further. Long before ecofeminism as a theoretical concept evolved in the West, Indian women writers have investigated the complexities of women's relationships with nature. The literary works by Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai and Anuradha Roy have explored women-nature connection. The works of Kamala Markandaya,

[48] Cathleen McGuire and Colleen McGuire, "Grass-Roots Ecofeminism: Activating Utopia," 187.

[49] Janis Birkeland, "Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice," in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animal, Nature,* ed. Greta Gaard (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 15.

for example, have been written in the 1950s. Her works reflect a keen sense of environmental awareness. Her female characters are depicted as a vital component of the natural world. This is because our civilization has always valued nature, considered it as divine, and worshipped it as a Goddess; therefore there has always been an eco-consciousness in the Indian psyche. As a result, what Western ecofeminism refers to as spiritual ecofeminism comes fairly naturally to Indian women authors who have depicted human beings within the natural world. They all have one thing in common: environmental awareness. They examine the numerous facets and dimensions of Indian ecofeminism in their works, bringing us face-to-face with this fascinating world where women and the environment interact in so many different ways. These literary works become centres of resistance, questioning and criticising dualisms such as man-woman and culture-nature. *Nectar in a Sieve* (2007), first published in 1954, by Markandaya, is a great example of what transpired in postcolonial India when the country transitioned from agricultural to industrial. We see a society destroyed by industrialization through the life and struggles of the key character Rukmani. Land exploitation is inextricably linked to women's exploitation. When a local, self-sustaining economy fails, we see that women and children suffer the most. Many female characters in the story, including Rukmani's elder daughter Ira, resort to prostitution in order to survive and support their families. They are forced to sell their bodies since they have no other method of earning money. In the village, we come across several fatalities of small children. Finally, they are forcibly removed from their homeland. Rukmani correctly compares the factory's expansion to the growth of an untended weed that consumes the lives of all other life forms in its path.

They are presently relocating to the city. Ecofeminists see urbanity not as a location of opportunity, but as a source of pollution and an uninhabitable environment for poor people. However, in the story, city space is depicted as a multi-dimensional realm that is both harsh and forgiving, allowing Rukmani to return to her roots and start over. When Rukmani

returns, she notices a different form of modernisation in the village: a poor people's hospital. Women writers give this idea of an alternate modernity, which serves to widen the scope of ecofeminist theory as a whole.

Kamala Markandaya's 1960 novel *A Silence of Desire* (2009) revolves around the issues of the clash between old values and modern ideals, as well as between faith and reason. Dandekar, a clerk from a middle-class family, enjoys spending time with his wife Sarojini. Dandekar expects his wife and kids to give their all because he is the family's main provider of financial security. He is so used to being obeyed that even a small deviation from the regular task upsets him. He often makes jokes about the Tulasi plant while making fun of his God-fearing and devout wife. Sarojini is quite attractive because of how easily she fits into the position of a traditional wife. He is oblivious to Sarojini's deteriorating health since he is preoccupied with his own happiness. In an effort to get help and treatment for her problem, Sarojini visits a Swamy, a spiritual healer. She decides to follow the path that is consistent with her ideals this time rather than following her husband's counsel. The novel *A Silence of Desire* gives the reader the chance to gain a fresh perspective on who they are by fusing modernity with traditionalism in order to build a better future.

In the opening pages of the book, Sarojini is shown worshipping a Tulsi plant. She naturally has this ability to perceive the divine in nature because she practises this well-known Hindu ritual. She has a unique relationship with the Tulsi plant since it has ingrained itself in her. She experiences the scent of the plant as being embedded in her being and finds comfort in it. Dandekar, her spouse, makes fun of her viewpoint. He disapproves of Sarojini's views as superstitious. He embraces the Western conception of reason and science. He gives Sarojini's opinions little weight because he is so preoccupied with his own ideas and convictions. To treat a growth in her womb, Sarojini starts going to a Swamy who practises faith healing. Regardless of Dandekar's responses to her covert visits to the Swamy, she

remains silent in order to preserve her emotional and spiritual well-being. She is convinced that she will not be healed without faith because she is aware that faith and reason cannot coexist. Rajam, a relative of hers, also criticises Dandekar for having lost trust in religion as a result of his British-trained education. Dandekar becomes sceptical of her since she is hiding the truth. When his home life breaks down and stumbles, he also feels uneasy and anxious. He has always believed that his wife is his property, but now he believes that Swamy is stealing her from him. She doesn't tell her spouse about her visits out of concern that he might disapprove of her choice. Dandekar is aware that Swami is separating him from his wife, but when he learns the truth about Sarojini's neglect of her family he is deeply sorry and convinces Sarojini to visit the hospital. The difficult issue of personal freedom and each person's obligation to ensure the other's freedom arises in this situation. In place of surgery, Sarojini supports faith-healing.

The conflict between their wills and beliefs in old values and contemporary rationalistic views results from their sincere disagreements. Men like Dandekar, who are alien to both British and Indian cultures and have no roots in either, are the result of British education. The ecofeminist aspects that surface in the novel are: a woman’s spiritual connection to nature, critiquing a man’s rejection of faith and traditional knowledge, criticism of the idea that the Western system is the only viable system of knowledge.

The leaders of India have adopted the Western approach to progress after independence. Cities are a result of it. The city is projected as a location where individuals from various backgrounds and communities are welcome to work and improve their quality of life. But in reality, the city becomes an alien environment where the poor struggles to survive. The main premise of Kamala Markandaya's novel *A Handful of Rice* (2008) which was initially published in 1966 is this critique of the metropolis as seen from the perspective of Ravi. This book can be considered a sequel to Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve.* In *Nectar*

in a Sieve, we have seen how a village family is compelled to abandon their ancestral home and relocate to the city due to a project of modernity, a tannery factory. We dig more into the grim realities of the urban environment in *A Handful of Rice*. The protagonist of the tale is Ravi, a farmer's son in Tamil Nadu. He travels to Madras in order to break free from the chains of poverty. He is instantly confronted by the harsh realities of city life. He wanders the city streets in quest of a way to make a living and survive with no food and no shelter. The city, which has the appearance of being a fantastical land of potential, turns out to be unfriendly and unforgiving. Ravi is compelled to look for money and revert to illicit activity. For a country boy in the metropolis, survival becomes increasingly difficult. For those like Ravi, modernity creates a lethal trap from which there is no escape. The critique of modernity is one of the ecofeminist concerns that surface in this novel.

The fundamental ecological concern that is discussed in Kamala Markandaya's novel *The Coffer Dams* (2008), first published in 1969, surfaces through the interaction between modernism and indigenous lifestyles. A dam is being built in a southern Indian town. Modernization first affects nature and ecology. Highways require levelling hills. The river receives trash. The dam will then manage river flow. These interruptions cause conflict between project managers and indigenous peoples whose lives are entwined with nature. Pollution of the river would affect their livelihood. To build the dam, these indigenous people are relocated. Modernity is most evident when people are forced to give up their homes and land for development. The colonisers who lived in India before independence and the policymakers of the newly independent country refuse to recognise that the lands belong to the people, particularly the marginalised and tribal communities. The land is their home, source of sustenance, and their deity. Coercive land seizure threatens their existence. After India’s independence, its leaders continued to adhere to the same principles that had been set by white Europeans. Even in free India, the government takes land for construction and

development initiatives. Ironically, marginalised communities don't benefit from the projects of modernity. The new world order values things that are profitable for a few powerful people and devalues those that are not. Vandana Shiva writes: "Native use was non-use, native lands were empty and void and could be defined as valueless, free nature, to be justly appropriated. New colonies are now being created, carved out by reductionist thought, capital and profit controlled by patriarchal might."[50] Based on modern science and technology, which is profit-oriented and blind to other forms of knowledge and viewpoints, the new order is currently rewriting what is valuable and what is not, as well as what is right and what is wrong.

In Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* (2015), first published in 1977, the connection between woman and nature is explored in a private space; her world is a domestic world where women from different backgrounds relate to nature differently. The themes of gender, urbanity, industry, and exploitation are all addressed in this novel. Nanda, Raka, and Ila all have different relationships with nature. However, it would be wrong to assume that this connection is a universal one given that they are all women from developing nations. Nanda Kaul, the novel's protagonist, is seeking a location devoid of interpersonal relationships and interactions and finds solace in the bleak and desolate mountain village. We learn that she was a vice chancellor's wife and spent a significant portion of her life living in a big house under the shadow of her husband. She is angry with the double standard that subjugates women and pushes them to fulfil roles that are prescribed by society in the metropolitan, high society life. When she discovers that her granddaughter Raka is visiting, she becomes upset as she no longer wants human company. Raka, on the other hand, interacts with nature in a totally different way. She enjoys the company of every living thing that lives in the natural world while she is lost in the woods. Desai writes: "She would return with her brown legs scratched, her knees bruised, sucking a finger stung by nettles, her hair brown under a layer

[50] Mies and Shiva. *Ecofeminism*, 32.

of dust, her eyes very still and thoughtful as though she had visited strange lands and seen fantastic improbable things that lingered in the mind."[51]

Through Raka's eyes, we are able to see that the so-called development projects are also having a negative impact on the natural environment even at high altitudes. Even though Raka is born and raised in the city, she has never lost sight of the significance of protecting the natural world and all of its inhabitants. Desai's work makes a significant contribution to the established paradigm of ecofeminist theory by demonstrating that it is erroneous to assume that women's connections to nature are universal, particularly in the developing world.

Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* (2015), first published in 1980, explores woman's bond with nature. It is the story of Maya, whose inner world, both her suffering and her joy, are represented through the visuals of nature; the natural landscapes mirror the characters' psychological landscapes. Maya's narrative is the story of a middle class Indian woman who lives a life of deprivation, grief, and longing under an oppressive patriarchal system that does not provide her the space to express herself or the opportunity to be heard. The primary objective of ecofeminism is to hear what women and the environment have to say and to give them a voice.

Gautama, a successful and active lawyer, marries Maya, a youthful and sensitive woman. Maya's mother died when she was a young child, so her father raised her with a lot of affection. But because her partner is unable to satiate her intense desire for love and her zest for life, this affection casts a horrible shadow over her marriage. She makes an effort to fit in with Leila and Pom's social group and even attends the party Mrs. Lal is hosting, but none of her efforts are able to stop her dreams from occurring. She is plagued by a vision of

[51] Anita Desai, *Fire on the Mountain* (Haryana: Random House India, 2015), 50.

an albino astrologer who predicted the demise of either her husband or herself, making it impossible for her to get a peaceful sleep. She gradually goes insane as a result of being plagued by a fear of dying, and she unintentionally wishes his death. When Gautama accepts her invitation to join her on the top terrace, she pushes him over the edge. The protagonist's mental and emotional landscapes, as well as the intensity of those landscapes, are depicted in the novel using images from nature. Maya suffers from mental torment and complete isolation as a result of her interior environment, which is at odds with the social reality of her life. The novel's ecofeminist elements include Maya's inner landscape mirroring in nature, her close relationship with nature, and gender issues.

Where Shall We Go This Summer (2015), first published in 1984, narrates the story of Sita. Through the character of Sita, Desai aims to present the conflicts between the rural and the urban world. She much like Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* lives a life of boredom and mechanical comforts in the city of Mumbai. Her heart, though, longs to remain in Manori, the seaside community where she has been raised. She has been obliged to follow her husband, Raman, in their directives and take part in the bustle of city life. She yearned to flee into the island's eerie magical world at this moment in her life. She might find solace and protection in this fascinating natural environment by escaping the absurdities of the androcentric world. Although the metropolitan world appears to be one of order, opportunity, and prosperity, Sita believes it is devoid of morals, meaning, and empathy. In a scene from the book, she can be seen observing crows as they attempt to scavenge on a wounded eagle while standing on the balcony of her apartment. Crows serve as a metaphor for urban civilization. It thrives off of the hopes and dreams of the local populace. The wounded eagle represents Sita's wounded spirit, which yearns to escape modernity's constraints and return to the tranquility of the country where she has spent her formative years.

Sita has a close relationship with the island of Manori. The island is a reflection of Sita's internal reality. Additionally, there is a startling similarity in appearance. The housekeeper Moses notices Sita's lack of vitality and attractiveness. He thinks she isn't as smart or as sophisticated as her father. On the other hand, the island is not a fantastical location: "Manori was not a romantic island. Besides its palms, its deserted beach, its wild silence, there was that most squalid of villages, with its open drains, its mangy pai dogs, drunkards." They both share a similar spirit in addition to having similar appearances. The island's beauty is unprocessed. The island lacks the refinement of the city. Sita is not interested in dressing up like a city dweller either. In the untamed landscape she feels liberated and also at home. Even though she is alone herself on the island, she senses a presence. She experiences thrill and a sense of belonging in Manori. Her husband, however, is oblivious to her strong connection to the island. She is simply being unreasonable and obstinate in his eyes. Raman disapproves of Sita's decision to give birth on the island. Raman sees himself as a modern, scientifically inclined man who believes in the new ideals of development. He views the island of Manori as wild and primitive. Both Sita and nature in this novel share the common space of being the marginal. Both are oppressed by the patriarchal forces. These are the ecofeminist concerns that the novel addresses.

The Village by the Sea (2015), first published in 1984, is another of Desai's novels, and it tackles complex issues like modernization and displacement. The narrative focuses on Hari, the son of a fisherman who struggles to make ends meet throughout his life. The reason for this is that Hari and his family are already victims of the negative effects that modernization has had on nature. They are unable to catch enough fish for two primary reasons: first, they do not have access to modern fishing boats, and second, the sea is not producing as much food for them as it formerly did. The overfishing and pollution are to blame for this situation. The scars that modernization leaves behind are already visible. And

as the chemical factory is being established up in the village, Hari has the feeling that the villagers will no longer have access to the resource that will allow them to survive. The land that is currently used for agricultural purposes would be converted into the site of the plant. Not only will that, but the chemical fertilisers that will be generated supplant the more organic fertilisers. At first glance, it looks like the facility will create jobs and that the fertilisers will boost crop yield. However, the reality differs from what modernism promises. The factory robs the inhabitants of their land, and the fertilisers deplete the soil's fertility. The proprietors will be the winners, while the peasants will be the losers. The only option is to relocate to the city. That is exactly what Hari does.

Hari in *The Village by the Sea* and Rukmani in *The Nectar in a Sieve* share the same fate. Both are displaced. Modernisation causes displacement. The people who lived in nature now dwell in concrete slums. These slums are inhabitable, filthy, polluted and yet are filled with people. As more people from the village move to the city, the slums grow and the quality of life decreases. What went wrong in the concept of modernity is answered by the women authors. Development threatens sacred land and people's rights over it. World-class economic systems and open markets have disintegrated national borders while strengthening state frontiers. Such a development strategy will never be able to deliver on the promises of modernity. It will have dire effects on the poorest.

Anuradha Roy's *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (2008), is a story of a Bengali family living alone in a large new home on the outskirts of a town. Here, lives entwine and fall apart. The novel explores the interactions that women have with urbanisation, development, and the city as a setting for such relationships. The prospects that the city gives to the women have echoes of the language that is associated with globalisation, which is the idea that all people should have equal opportunities. The duality of nature and culture does not allow for the coexistence of interactions of this kind. The movement from rural to urban settings

demonstrates that postcolonial ecofeminism is not a fixed ideology that can be confined to solitary settings such as wilderness or rural areas. The novel also includes aspects of urban paranoia and madness as a symptom of coping with the pressures of globalisation and development. This serves to highlight the fact that the urban environment can be a space for both the creation and destruction of new things, as the novel demonstrates.

The story takes place in West Bengal's Songarh, a small village. The region provides an abundance of resources as well as stunning natural beauty. This area has received attention because it contains vast amounts of mica. This finding alters the environment. The forests are also thought to be rich in a number of other important elements. This provides an opportunity for those who want to profit from the pristine natural environment, such as investors, miners, and workers. Roy notes that prior to the discovery of the mica deposit and the establishment of the enterprises, the animals roamed freely in the forests. The trees, the animals, and the people of the land are silent as they watch this steady transformation. Additionally, the husbands and other male family members in the story assault the women sexually and emotionally. Women usually find themselves unable to express the intensity of their pain because they lack a voice, much like the silent forests. A woman's body is viewed in the same manner that nature is—as a resource to be used for selfish purposes. The story addresses problems including gender violence, deep connections between women and nature, and environmental devastation brought on by modernization and industrialization.

Anuradha Roy's novel, *The Folded Earth* (2011) takes place in an urban environment and focuses on the relationship between its characters. She shares her concerns on how gender roles, family structures, animal and avian populations, and the environment in its broadest sense will be affected by globalization and industrialization in India. Diwan Sahib and Puran, a social outsider, are the two most important male characters in this story. These male characters are acutely aware of the significance of preserving ecological balance and

harmony within the natural world. An extraordinary talent for showing affection and concern for animals is exhibited by Puran. His connection with the natural world is nearly religious in nature. Puran's kindness to an abandoned fawn shows his love of nature. Diwan Saheb knows the complexities of man-nature relations. Given his extensive experience, he possesses the ability to envision the future of the region and its residents. There are also depictions of female characters in the natural world. Maya's companion Charu, a village girl can also connect deeply with nature. Charu and Puran's relationship to nature defies materialism. Roy explains: "He could not talk to people, but he could talk to animals. Animals trusted him. Foxes came to him if he called them Injured birds arrive on his doorstep to be cured. Dogs with broken legs found their way to his cowshed."[52]

As her cow, Gauri, disappears into the forest, she loses sleep. She stays with her injured cow until it dies. Despite living with Charu, her mother cannot connect with nature. So, ecofeminists, particularly materialist ones, may be wrong to assume that working-class women have a relationship with nature because they work in it. Roy is opposed to the notion that there is a straightforward and unambiguous correlation between women and the natural world. She deals with issues such as bribery and the battle between social classes, and she demonstrates that an ecofeminist concern embraces all forms of resistance against dominance. It also shows that in the study of ecofeminism, ecology is not always an external environment, a big outside that we go into. It's a study of interrelationships.

Except Anuradha Roy's novels they others have been written a very before ecofeminism becomes a prominent critical theory. The fight that actual ecofeminists put up against the mistreatment of the natural world is what gives rise to the ecofeminist ideology. It discusses the different types of dominance and looks for a solution by attempting to alter the

[52] Anuradha Roy, *The Folded Earth* (Gurgaon: Hachette India, 2011), 170.

way power is structured and functions in our society. When literary texts are studied through the lens of ecofeminist theory, numerous characteristics that the mainstream theoretical framework does not take notice of appear. This is because ecofeminist theory reads literary texts in a certain way. These are well-formulated goals that explain why literary writings that address concerns of environmental injustice, women's struggle, and other marginal issues are significant in contributing to the building of ecofeminist theory that is suited to the third world. The points that get highlighted in such literary texts are:

1. What are the aspects that never became a part of mainstream theory? And why those aspects are important, particularly in the case of the third world.
2. How these new approaches towards evaluating literary texts give us fresh new perspectives over its style, content and metaphor, etc.
3. How the processes explore connections between characters: nature-women, nonhuman nature and human world, nature-culture.
4. How ecofeminist theory successfully explores the connection between all forms of power domination, not just women and nature.

The literary texts end up questioning some of the standpoints of theory itself. Those are:

1. An essentialist connection between women and nature.
2. An unquestioning acceptance of the connection as monolithic and simplistic without recognizing that women’s position in different cultures and societies can alter or change the modes of this connection.
3. The “purity and authenticity” of third world cultures that celebrate the connection. It doesn’t take into account the social hierarchies inherent in such cultures.
4. Absence of the male voice.

Conclusion:

The function of these women writers as contributors to the formation of a distinct Indian ecofeminism becomes important when they deviate from the Western theoretical framework. Sometimes these women writers go along with the established theoretical framework, and other times they deviate from it. Since the country gained its independence, there has been development in the areas of industry, the economy, and technology. The lives of many individuals are impacted in a variety of ways by this process. Within the framework of ecofeminist theory, there is a widely held belief that cultures in the Third World, which are generally considered to be unaffected by changes in their external environments, have been able to maintain their traditional beliefs and practises, including the practise of nature worship. This concept of the Third World is a Western representation that ignores the fact that India is a land of many different cultures and that women have different social positions; as a result, it is impossible to have a synchronised connection with nature. There is not a single coordinated development but rather a number of them. These impacts are diverse in nature due to the fact that the characters speak from a variety of viewpoints, including urban and rural settings, public and personal worlds, and spiritual as well as material perspectives. All of them represent several perspectives from which one can approach the concept of ecofeminism in India. As a result, the examination of the works produced by these female authors provides us with a picture of Indian ecofeminism that is complete with all of the movements' numerous facets, views, and varieties.

Because of this, ecofeminism in India has emerged as a distinct method that not only investigates the myriad connections that exist between women and the natural world, but also brings together all of the disparate entities. This facet of ecofeminism also extends the boundaries of feminism in general in new and interesting directions. It compels us to acknowledge the fact that emancipation does not include the acquisition of equal rights

within the context of the already prevalent social order, which is characterised by patriarchy and capitalism. The only way for genuine emancipation is for a significant shift in the system that is responsible for the subversion of all marginal subjects. Ecofeminism is an umbrella term that incorporates all of the issues that are considered marginal, inferior, or less valuable by capitalist patriarchy. The term ‘ecofeminism’ refers to a body of research that examines the quality of life of women, children, and peripheral communities in developing countries. They are able to relate different kinds of oppressive systems, including sexism, racism, classism, speciesism, and naturism, as being mutually reinforcing one another. Because of this, ecofeminism can never be considered a "one issue movement". The emancipation of all communities and groups that are held in oppression is the objective of the ecofeminist movement. Lori Gruen focuses on the importance of addressing all marginal issues, and she finds many Western theoretical approaches as incapable of doing so as: “They have situated themselves in the tradition of single-mindedness so common on Western institutions. Such exclusivity not only clouds the expansive nature of oppression, but also hinders the process of undermining such oppressions and ultimately liberating all those oppressed.”[53]

At this point in the discussion, it is necessary to mention yet another aspect of these female writers' thoughts on nature that stands out sharply from the traditional representation of nature. The literature that has been produced throughout the British Romantic period sheds light on the significant role that nature plays in the lives of human beings. It is an inspiration, a mirror that reflects man's emotional, physical, and spiritual development, and an ideal that serves man's purpose of finding meaning in a hostile universe. The difficulty with such perspectives on nature is that they place man at the centre of the discussion once again. The human race is able to see and analyse nature, but they are unable to form a connection with it

[53] Lori Gruen, “Dismantling Oppression: An Analysis of the Connection between Women and Animals,” in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animal , Nature,* ed. Greta Gaard (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 60.

because of the 'difference' that exists between them. Stacy Alaimo writes: “this ‘unity’ with nature denies nature its own specificity; nature serves as a mirror for the human subject who does not seek connection across difference but merely wishes to conform a preconceived image.”[54] She further criticises the Romantic approach towards nature by saying: “Taking disembodied, romantic flight strengthens the dichotomies between the corporeal and the ethereal, the body and mind, nature and culture.”[55] When nature is presented as an entity that bears similarity and at the same time dissimilarities with human subject then the presentation can be defined as devoid of romantic preconceptions. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, *The Coffer Dams*, *The Village by the Sea*, “nature” is not portrayed as passive where man can see himself being reflected. Nature is benevolent and violent too; nature is portrayed as a giver and at the same time as a destroyer.

Ecofeminism seeks to undermine hierarchal dualisms in which men govern as reason, subject, and master while colonising women as nature, object, and slave. It does this through encouraging women's introspective re-associations with nature. Re-establishing fixed binaries is not what is meant by attempts to reconnect women with nature; rather, these initiatives seek to directly confront the oppressiveness of dualistic systems that dominate much of Western thinking. The connection of environmental problems and the exploitation of women call for a critical examination of power dynamics that involve the suffering of many marginalised groups as subservient others.[56] Indian women writers of the post-independence age have been examining the link that women have with the natural world. They have also reflected upon the power dynamics that are prevalent in the Third World societies. They have

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[54] Stacy Alaimo, “Skin Dreaming: The Body Transgressions of Fielding Burke, Octavia Butler, and Linda Hogan,” in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, ed. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (Chicago: University of Illinois Press,1998), 125.

[55] Alaimo, “Skin Dreaming”, 126.

[56] Karen Ya Chu Yang, *Woman and Nature: Beyond Dualism in Gender, Body and Environment*, ed. Douglas A. Vakoch and Sam Mickey (New York: Routledge, 2018), 27.

been able to reflect an eco-consciousness in the works that they have produced. This consciousness recognises that human lives are an integral component of nature as a whole and understands that the exploitation of nature has the potential to negatively impact human lives. By representing women characters within nature, by exploring issues of race, class, gender, by critiquing Western model of progress these women authors have given us incredible narratives that create space for re-evaluation of human's place within the natural scheme of things. They make us realise that nature and its diverse components are fundamentally connected. If only we can realise the 'oneness' inherent in all living and non-living components of the natural world, we can envision a world of equality for all.

CHAPTER TWO

Many Women Many Bonds

"This earth is my sister: I love her daily grace, her silent daring, and how loved I am, how we admire this strength in each other, all that we have lost, all that we have suffered, all that we know: we are stunned by this beauty, and I do not forget: what she is to me, what I am to her."[57]

Introduction:

There is a widespread belief that women and nature are deeply connected. This connection has been explained in terms of spirituality, materiality, culture and history. Carolyn Merchant in her seminal work *The Death of Nature* (1990) elucidates the notion that the concept of nature and women are constructions both historical and social. Nature and women do not possess any fundamental intrinsic traits. It is how we have perceived binaries of nature-culture or man-woman in a specific social condition that determines how they are valued or devalued. Merchant gives the readers a set of questions:

How have people historically conceptualised nature?

How have they behaved in relationship to that construction?

What historical evidence supports a particular interpretation? [58]

The objective of ecofeminism is to critically examine such social constructions and advocate for the empowerment of marginalized individuals and groups. Thus ecofeminist aim is to

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[57] Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1979), 219.

[58] Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1990), 14.

overturn modern constructions of nature and women as passive and inert and a subject of man's control and domination.

One of the bonds that women and nature are tied with can be explained as a shared history of oppression in the hands of capitalist patriarchy.[59] There are primarily two movements that are taking place around the world at the present time. First, women are struggling to free themselves from constrains, both economic and social, which have kept them subordinated to men. And second, the struggle of environmentalists and activists to free nature from the clutches of capitalism that has been viewing nature as a resource to be exploited. The common factor in these cases of struggle is the modern, capitalist social structure that has been ruling over the nature and women.[60] The common experience of being oppressed serves as a unifying factor between them. In addition to this correlation, there exists another commonality that unites the struggles against patriarchy and environmental atrocity: an underlying social order that has been devaluing nature and women.[61] It also generates the possibility of new values and social structures based not on the exploitation of nature and women but rather a system that offers space for gender equality and environmental integrity.

This study examines the literary works of Indian female authors, focusing on the portrayal of female characters and their diverse relationships with nature, encompassing many forms of connection and response. These women protagonists belong to different social positions and thereby the fundamental quality of such connections differs in each individual

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[59] Melissa Leach and Cathy Green, "Gender and Environmental History: From Representation of Women and Nature to Gender Analysis of Ecology and Politics," *Environment and History* 3, no. 3 (October 1997): 358,URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/20723052

[60] Karen J Warren and Jim Cheney, "Ecological Feminism and Ecosystem Ecology," *Ecological Feminism* 6, no. 1 (Spring, 1991) : 182, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810040

[61] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Ecofeminism: First And Third World Women," American Journal of Theology & Philosophy 18, no. 1 (January 1997): URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/27944009

case. The uniqueness of their respective bonding with nature makes us realise that any theoretical approach that talks about women-nature connection in the Third World without considering the multiplicities of connections between women and nature is bound to be wrong. There is no one bond; there are in fact many bonds, many connections. A woman's social position determines the way she is going to connect with nature. A materialist ecofeminist would like to think so. While exploring the multiple dimensions of the relationship between woman and nature the study of one aspect becomes paramount: the position of the 'other' in the paradigm of power. Nature and women are the 'Other' and are looked upon as resources. There lies a connection. Along with the differences in the relationship between women and nature, there remains an unchanging core: the exploitation of both as inferior. Thus any approach to evaluate Indian ecofeminism would invariably reconstruct the main theoretical paradigms as complex, multidimensional and dynamic.

Before going into the analysis of how the women authors have explored the connections between women and nature we must address how these approaches of connecting both nature and women are significantly different than the traditional approaches towards the bond between nature and women. The traditional approach sees both women and nature as care-giving, loving entities. They only become important in respect to "Man". This sort of explanation of the connection between woman and nature establishes the secondary position of both within the dominant power structure. Ecofeminists believe that a simplistic idea of nature-women connection can lead to problems of essentialism. The traditional approach is rather simplistic in this regard. These approaches reaffirm the prevalent dualisms in society. Maureen Devine, an ecofeminist critic emphasises the need to go beyond the traditional idea about women and nature and how they connect specially in literary texts. She writes: "We have detailed accounts of parallel use and abuse of women and nature through the centuries.

The images are easily available to us: nature as nurturing mother, the mother earth, virgin woods, images associated with the pre-modern organic world."[62]

She feels that such identification of nature with that of women is problematic. She further believes that to cast this in the role of the protagonist as opposed to the antagonist which is the patriarchal mechanistic society, the market economy, and industrial technology is too simplistic.[63] Such simplistic approaches have been questioned by ecofeminist theorists and the Indian women authors as well. Indian women authors (Anita Desia, Kamala Markandaya and Anuradha Roy) have portrayed women characters within nature. Their state of mind, their pleasures and pain, their struggles and victories and their love and loss all find expression in the environment in which they reside or have chosen to inhabit. The bond can be explained in terms of materiality, sustenance or an inherent affection for the natural world. Some bonds even surpass the mere materiality and almost become spiritual in nature. This spiritual connection between women and nature in an Eastern country like India has been an inseparable part of its culture.[64] Vandana Shiva, an Ecofeminist activist and the founder of 'Navdandya', an organisation that preserves organic seeds, writes: "For third world women who fight for the conservation of their survival base their spiritual icing-on-the-cake, the divorce of the spiritual from the material is incomprehensible for them, the term Mother Earth does not need to be qualified by inverted commas, because they regard the earth as a living being which guarantees their own and all their fellow creature's survival."[65]

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[62] Maureen Devine, *Women and Nature* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 25.

[63] Devine, *Women and Nature* , 26.

[64] Indra Nath Choudhuri, "Environment and Literature: Aesthetics Determines Cultural Ecology," Indian *Literature* 43, no. 5 (Sept.-Oct., 1999): 177, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/23342694

[65] Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (New Delhi: Rawat Publication, 2010), 19.

Nature and Woman Connection in Anuradha Roy's *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (2008) and *The Folded Earth* (2011):

Anuradha Roy's *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (2008) explores a woman's bond with nature at a personal level. Kananbala, Amulya's wife finds solace in the companionship of nature, which serves as her sole source of comfort. A sense of isolation engulfs her at her residence in Songarh. There are little activities for her to engage in. She patiently anticipates her husband's arrival from the factory and eagerly looks forward to spending some time with Amulya. But Amulya is completely oblivious to her needs and desires. She finds solace in nature:

> The night creaked and rustled. The cold air carried to her the urgent whine of a fox. Answering foxes echoed its call and their barks multiplied across the forests and fields, drawing circles of sound around the house. The foxes were the companions of her long, wide-awake nights now...Not just foxes, she had wanted to tell her father later. In her lonely, wakeful hours she had started out of the window as the roar of what she thought was lion reverberated in the forest. The lion's roar was secret she could not share with anybody else.[66]

On the other hand, we have a character like Kananbala's sister-in-law who rarely connects with nature. For her, the quiet place of Songarh is like an isolated island and living there is not possible at all for her. She says: "I don't know, but I couldn't live here- in Songarh, I mean. Yes, I know, it's clean and empty and Calcutta is dirty and crowded and noisy. But the crowds and noise keep me alive! It's so soundless here, I thought for a moment I'd gone deaf!"[67] In depicting a woman's bond with nature Roy introduces characters who exhibit contrasting ties with the natural world. Some are able to establish a profound connection; some fail to bond at any level. Thus here the complexity of a woman-nature connect has been explored.

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[66] Anuradha Roy, *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (India: Picador India, 2009), 19.

[67] Roy, *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, 26.

While Kananbala connects to the forests and the wildlife within nature for her daughter-in-law, Shanti, the connection is with the ever flowing river. Shanti is pregnant and is at her parent's house in Manoharpur. There is a river that flows alongside her ancestral home. She goes up to the river cautiously and looks at it. She feels that the river is tied up with her destiny. She knows the river from her childhood days and now when she is about to become a mother she feels a close affinity with the life-giving river: "How close the river seemed, she thought, this river of her childhood. Every year it seemed to come a little closer and, with a fatalism for which she ridiculed herself, Shanti felt her destiny tied to that wide liquid ribbon"[68] Along with representing the women-nature bond, Roy subtly alludes to an additional theme: the formidable power of nature. The river that is a source of life can be a destroyer as well. In a conversation between Shanti's father, Bikash Babu and his friend Patol Babu the same concern regarding the ever widening river is mentioned: "What a sad irony...that the water that is our Saviour is so easily turned into Destroyer. Truly like Lord Shiva."[69]

Anuradha Roy's novel, *The Folded Earth* (2011), explores the relationships between multiple female characters and their connections to the natural world. The protagonist Maya is a city-born urban woman. After the death of her partner in a trekking adventure in the Himalayas she decides to stay in a small hill town. Her agony of losing a loved one is soothed by nature. She slows down, begins to look inwards and finds solace. Her livelihood doesn't depend on nature as it does in the case of Charu, the village girl. But Maya finds a connection in the wildness of the nature around, the untamed mountain land is fascinating and quite similar with her as we know from the very beginning of the novel that Maya is a free soul and couldn't be tamed by the chains of patriarchy. Charu's connection with nature is a complex

[68] Roy, *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, 67.

[69] Roy, *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, 67.

one that exceeds the simplicity of a materialistic bond with it. She is deeply connected with the surrounding nature. This bond can only be explained in terms of love rather than any other medium of connection. Her love for each entity within nature makes us see how complete and intricate the interconnections are between a woman and nature. It is beautifully reflected in her relationship with the cow Charu's grandmother owns; she is named Gouri. Roy writes:

> Gouri had come as a large-eyed, timid, sweet-faced calf when Charu was a girl and whenever she was troubled or scolded by her grandmother she still ran to Gouri and buried her face in the cow's warm flanks, breathing in its comforting scent of dung and straw and milk. Gouri's eyes were dark pools of patience and had lashes that were a mile long. She never kicked however long Charu held her.[70]

Maya talks about her garden which she describes as an "unkempt patch and it rippled with wilderness on the blue and gold morning".[71] Maya's state of mind and her personality are mirrored in the nature that surrounds her. Maya's garden lacks a meticulous maintenance and decorative elements; rather it is wild, like the virgin forest and away from the human civilization. In a way, this garden is more like Maya herself: untamed, adventurous, a free spirit. Roy time and again gives us descriptions of the untouched forest, its wilderness, the richness of its flora and fauna. When that pristine nature is damaged, this emphasis on the unknown, virgin beauty of nature has a greater impact on our minds.

When Maya leaves her rented flat and comes to live in the mountain village of Ranikhet we see that she begins to develop a personal bond with nature. Within the lap of nature, she becomes conscious of how nature influences us, cradles us, and provides for us. She also begins to perceive how in the hands of rich powerful people nature is exploited and destroyed. Chapter 4 begins with Maya's impressions of two different landscapes: one is the mountain range of Himalaya and the other is the Deccan. In the Deccan she grew up, it was

[70] Anuradha Roy, *The Folded Earth* (Gurgaon, Hachette India, 2011), 35.

[71] Anuradha Roy, *The Folded Earth* (Gurgaon, Hachette India, 2011), 35.

her home that she left to be with Michael. And after the death of Michael, she comes to live in a place that is close to Michael's heart. She has been inextricably tied with the mountains throughout this journey, from the Deccan range to the Himalayas. Her response to nature therefore is influenced from her childhood as well as adulthood experiences in nature.

Charu's bond with nature presents another dimension in the understanding of the woman-nature connection. Her bond is different than that of Maya. Unlike Maya, she is born and brought up in the mountain village. She is uneducated and belongs to the lower strata of the society. But her relationship with nature is unique and cannot be explained in materialistic terms though much of the financial gain of Charu's family depends on nature. The mountain forest provides fuel and Gouri, the cow is a source of nourishment for her family. Her everyday duties revolve around tending the cow. Thus taking care of the forest or the animals becomes essential for the survival of the village family. This establishes the materialistic bond. Yet Charu's connection with nature is not limited to that. She has a deeper connection to nature than any other character in the narrative. Her bond is close-knit because of her daily connection with nature, which even Kundan, the man she loves, doesn't understand. Roy writes: "He was half Nepalese, as she was, a child of the hills as well, but from a low-lying small town, so the sounds of the forest did not speak a language he understood."[72] However, it would be a mistake to assume that any woman who works in close proximity to nature has a special relationship with it. This isn't the case at all. Charu's grandmother rarely exhibits the same level of love and concern for the environment as Charu does. Here the female authors contribute a novel perspective to our understanding of the connection between women and the natural world.

[72] Anuradha Roy, *The Folded Earth* (Gurgaon, Hachette India, 2011), 35.

In the case of Maya, her bond with nature comes from her deep seated urge to free herself from the clutches of patriarchy. From her childhood, she has been suffering under the strict disciplinary ways of her father. Her father's attempt to sack a person just because that person is no longer needed in his business leaves Maya shocked. Maya in spite of being unhappy never thinks of leaving him. But now things have changed for her. For her father human beings are just resources that can be discarded if necessary. Maya leaves her father and searches for refuge in nature. Nature, the trees, the animals everything become a source of happiness for her. The feeling of being linked to nature fills her with love and gratitude. Her formative years are marked by a lack of contentment; the sole sources of joy for her have been her mother and nature. Roy writes: "After these encounters, I would retreat to a corner of our orchard where, under a chikoo tree, a stray dog twice had puppies. I bought food for the bitch, milk for the puppies, and sat with them for long hours, letting the puppies nip my hands, feeling myself restored limb by limb, muscle by muscle, by their bemused joy over a dead leaf or mound of soft earth they could dig."[73]

In the midst of adversity, Maya finds joy in nature. Every aspect of nature: the animals, the trees, the soil, and the mud, she perceives as interconnected. When she moves to Ranikhet, she feels the same sense of serenity and connectivity to nature that she felt when she was a youngster. The local people, the animals, the age old temple, the mountains everything have become a part of Maya's life in the mountain region. Roy writes: "None of the bells were mine, but this temple had replaced the chikoo tree of my childhood. Its surrounding forests of oak, chesnut, and rhododendron were so dense and dark that when I

[73] Roy, *The Folded Earth*, 64.

walked through them, the sky narrowed to a road-shaped ribbon overhead. ...There was the temple dog whom I fed batashas; I waited to hear him howl in tune with the priest's conch."[74]

In Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* (2015) we have a similar character named Maya who forms a profound connection with nature. Both the characters form a close relationship with nature that results from a desire to escape the clutches of patriarchy represented by the men in their lives. Maya's inner life is mirrored in the natural world. A multitude of natural phenomena and aspects of nature are mentioned, including birds, trees, flowers, their perfumes, the moon, and the seasons. They assist in presenting her psychological and emotional state. The richness of nature, its fullness delights her. What she needs in her private world nature seems to fulfil it. The smells, the sights, and sounds of nature provide her with the psychological and emotional satisfaction that she so desperately seeks: "I close my eyes and listen to the shrilling of ecstatic insects-ecstatic because it is the season of hot quivering sun, and they thrive on it. The tremulous, flower-tinted air is vibrant as a violin string set into motion by the fine, tender leg of a brilliant grasshopper. High, incessant sounds form out of the very sun and air on such a morning, like crystals in syrup. Delight makes me drowsy."[75]

Both of these female characters exhibit a profound connection with the natural world. The natural environment consistently provides individuals with the will to persevere and the serenity to endure at times of emotional exhaustion.

Nature and Woman Connection in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (2007):

In *Nectar in a Sieve* (2007) we are presented with the world of rural India. It is the world of the farmers. In this setting, the bond between women and nature is one that is closely connected and to a large extent can be explained in terms of materialist ecofeminism.

[74] Roy, *The Folded Earth*, 64.

[75] Anita Desai, *Cry, the Peacock* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 2015), 34.

Materialist ecofeminists reject the notion that women have a superior vision or moral authority but argue that an ethics that ignores society's gendered nature is doomed to fail because it ignores neither the material structure of human society nor how that structure affects the materiality of humanity's relationship with nature.[76] Materialist ecofeminists propose that a solution to the issues of environmental justice and environmental ethics must begin with an awareness of the social ties that drive existing patterns of unsustainability, as well as an understanding of humanity's, especially women's material relationships with nature.[77]

Nature provides essential resources such as food, fuel, and water, hence sustaining the livelihoods of the women and children residing in the village. For an Indian rural woman, nature is her source of sustenance as she enjoys a limited access in family property and wealth. She works in nature and if nature is destroyed her life is also damaged. A woman's association with nature also plays a significant role in maintaining the small scale village economy as well. Thus a connection of a village woman and nature can be examined from various perspectives. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, the main character is that of a village woman Rukmani. The story revolves around the life of Rukmani from being a wife and a mother of an Indian village to a labourer in an Indian town.

The novel is written in 1954, a time when India has emerged as a newly independent nation. The agricultural country is slowly turning into an industrial one. The policies of development are being implemented in many parts of Indian villages. These villages used to depend mostly on agriculture for their survival. The transformation of agricultural land into an industrial site results in significant alterations, impacting both the livelihoods of people

[76] Mary Mellor, "Ecofeminism and Environmental Ethics: A Materialist Perspective," *Ethics and the Environment 5,* no. 1(2000): 107.

[77] Mellor, *Ethics and the Environment*: 107.

and the economic landscape of the village. The villages have considerable challenges in adapting to the social and economic transformations. The women specially suffer the most as the nature that they used to work in, is now exploited for the projects of so called development. They lose their livelihood, their children are left malnourished and the small scale village economy is devastated. All these changes shape the lives of the central characters in the novel.

The narrative starts with Rukmani's marriage to Nathan, a man of lesser wealth and property than Rukmani's father. The parents of Rukmani has no other choice but to give her hand in marriage to Nathan as their wealth is also dwindling and for their survival the marriage is necessary. Rukmani comes to Nathan's home, a rather humble abode of a poor farmer. Nathan works on a borrowed land. But the profits are enough to sustain lives of these two people. But what they have as their own is a little piece of land that Rukmani has turned into a garden. Her efforts in the garden result in an abundance of vegetables, fruits and other essentials. This abundance turns the poor family into a comparatively wealthy one. It is evident that the woman's labour in the natural environment has proved to be beneficial for the whole family. Her work doesn't harm nature and yet provides the much needed support to her husband.

Materialist ecofeminists believe that women's association with the 'natural' is a result of the material exploitation of women's work, which is often done without compensation. Many critics argue that the work a woman does in the field, in the garden, within nature go unrecognised and therefore unpaid.[78] But her efforts in producing fruits and vegetables in the garden play a vital role in sustaining the lives of these people. In this narrative, Markandaya illustrates Rukmani's gradual development of a profound affinity with the soil as she

[78] Bina Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own- Gender and Land Rights in South Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 30.

diligently tends to her garden. Markandaya draws a parallel between the fertile soils with the capability of Rukmani of giving birth to her children. Both the land and Rukmani possess the capability to give birth to new life; this establishes a profound interconnectedness between them. Rukmani experiences an indescribable sense of joy when she engages in harvesting, planting seeds, and witnessing their subsequent growth. She says: "I tried not to show my pride. I tried to be offhand. I put the pumpkin away. But pleasure was making my pulse beat; the blood, unbidden, came hot and surging to my face. After that, ten times more jealous, I planted beans and sweet potatoes, brinjals and chillies, and they all grew well under my hand, so that we ate even better than we had done before."[79]

Because of Rukmani's engagement in the garden produce, the people in her family are well fed. This factor is important when we speak of women's work in the Third World societies. Her work in sustaining families and small scale village economy is largely unrecognized in the dominant social and economic system. Though unrecognised the woman's labour affects lives, families and societies.[80] We should add to this the aspect of joy of creation, a sense of wonder when the earth gives birth to such abundance. To Rukmani this joy is essential. Her work in the garden on the one hand, ensures nourishment for her children and on the other hand, provides a deep sense of satisfaction. The following lines represent the beauty and the complexity of her connection with the land:

> Now that I did not work in the fields I spent most of my time tending my small garden: the beans, the brinjals, the chillies and the pumpkin vine which had been the first to grow under my hand. And their growth to me was constant wonder – from the time the seed split and the first green shoots broke through, to the time when the young buds and fruit began to form. I was young and fanciful then, and it seemed to me not that they grew as I did, unconsciously, but that each of the dry, hard pellets I held in my palm had within it the very secret of life itself, curled tightly within, under leaf after protective leaf for safekeeping, fragile, vanishing with the first touch or

[79] Kamala Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve* (Navi Mumbai: Penguin Books, 2009), 11.

[80] Bina Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own- Gender and Land Rights in South Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 346.

> sight. With each tender seedling that unfurled its small green leaf to my eager gaze, my excitement would rise and mount; winged, wondrous. [81]

The vegetables that she grows in the field are sold to another woman named the Old Granny. The fact that she sells her products to a woman is important here as it establishes a localized economic framework centred on the collective interests of women. The system is harmless unlike the dominant economic system created by capitalism. Here Rukmani and Old Granny both survive through this village economic system controlled by the women. What is special in such exchanges is that though it sustains both on a material level but the concept of profit that often causes damage to nature or land is absent here. There exists a bond between the women too. The vegetables are not sources of money for them but rather are blessings of the sacred land. Rukmani says: "Once or twice a week I would go to the village to buy sugar, ghee and vegetables, calling on the way home at Durgan the milkman's to get curds, for our goat was running dry and there was not always enough milk to make my own. I liked going to the village and meeting its people, for they were a friendly lot and most of them anxious to help if they could. I got to know them very quickly: Old Granny who lived on what she made by selling peanuts and guavas."[82] She further expresses: "I tried not to show my pride. I tried to be offhand. I put the pumpkin away. But pleasure was making my pulse beat; the blood, unbidden, came hot and surging my face."[83] And again she exclaims: "The old lady would pick out the purple brinjals and yellow pumpkins, the shiny green and red chillies, feeling them with her wrinkled fingers and complimenting me on their size."[84]

The bond is special and unique to Rukmani. Nathan, her husband is happy because of the abundance of food and with it the financial gain. Yet Nathan does not experience the

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[81] Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, 14.

[82] Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, 9.

[83] Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, 11.

[84] Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, 25.

sense of joy that Rukmani feels. Nathan seeing Rukmani's excitement tells her that the sense of wonder will disappear after a few sowing and harvesting. To further elaborate on this aspect of the woman connecting deeply with the land, we can quote an observation made by Nancy Chodorow. She feels that the sense of an interconnected self is stronger in women rather than in men. Men, she believes, separate the self from nature. Thus both the sexes form different ideas of ethics: one is responsibility based (female) and the other is right based (male)[85]. Ecofeminists believe that the modern crises both in case of the violation of human and non-human rights come from a sense of self separate from nature[86]. Thus for Nathan the swelling garden does not offer any sense of wonder or connection. In fact he feels that even Rukmani would grow used to it and that her sense of wonder would disappear with time. But that does not happen: "There have been many sowings and harvestings, but the wonder has not departed."[87]

The examination of the interplay between women's roles in nature and society necessitates a thorough consideration of the garden's biodiversity. We begin to understand how important the diversity of her garden is for Rukmani's health, the health of her children, and the family's overall situation. She becomes a provider for her family as a result of her garden produce. She supports her husband, and as a result, her family thrives. We realise that this diversity of crops, veggies, and fruit production determines to a large extent the standard of living of the third world rural people. When the woman in the family begins to earn she contributes to the family's strength by allocating a portion of her earnings to ensuring the children's health. When this connection is disrupted by cash-cropping or industrialisation we

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[85] Nancy Chodorow. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

[86] Greta Gaard. "Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature" in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals , Nature*, ed. by Greta Gaard (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

[87] Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, 15.

encounter disastrous consequences: malnutrition, economic downfall together with growing gender inequality and violence. Women are the worse affected as the lives of these rural women depend on nature and the diverse productivity of it. The encroachment of modernism onto grain production results in the disruption of both nature and women's lives. The soil loses its potency and balance and women loses her control over her own life and the lives of her children. Crop uniformity significantly impacts the livelihoods of individuals who rely on the crop diversity for their sustenance. Thus sustainability of natural resources and biodiversity is synonymous with the survival of the third world communities, tribes and women. Small scale economy, local economy forms a self-sustaining system that does not interfere with the natural flow of nature, its potency and diversity. It does not require any trade with the outside world either. In such a system both nature and women are benefitted as resources are used sensibly and women participation remains important. Within such a system the families are not affluent as we understand in modern terms yet the families are well fed, healthy and retains a balance with the environment. Poverty enters in the lives of these people when the self-sufficient systems that are based on land's natural diversity are dismantled. Profit oriented large scale economic systems destroy nature. Such systems exploit resources mindlessly, create imbalance, and advocate uniformity in place of diversity. Thus poverty again is brought upon by modernity. Andy Smith writes in his essay: *Ecofeminism through an Anti-Colonial Framework* (1997) : "I would argue that colonization and not overpopulation is the cause of poverty in the Third world. Land which formerly supported local subsistence has been appropriated by imperialist countries to produce export crops for the First world. Since much of the land is going to produce export crops rather than crops to meet local needs, people in the Third world find themselves increasingly relying upon imports."[88] Rudolf Bahro in his book *From Red to Green? How the Financial Credit*

[88] Andy Smith, "Ecofeminism Through an Anti Colonial Framework," in *Ecofeminism: Women Culture Nature,*

Crunch Could Bankrupt the Environment (1984) discusses the impact of export crops in the lives of the common population. He explains that the hungry people of the third world do not at all benefit from the technology based market economy. The profits flow from corporation to corporation. These sectors have no interest in feeding the poor without the scope for further profit[89]. Much like Andy Smith, Rudolf Bahro thinks that poverty in the third world is more a result of modernity (industrialisation, capitalism, profit-oriented economy) than anything else.

Vandana Shiva in her book *Staying Alive* focuses on the role of women in agriculture. She claims that before the Western idea of development is borrowed by leaders of free India the Indian women used to have access to the field. Their work in the field was considered significant. Shiva writes:

> Women were the world's original food producers, and continue to be central to food production systems in the global South, in terms of the work they do in the food chain. The worldwide destruction of the feminine knowledge of agriculture, evolved over four to five thousand years, by a handful of white male scientists in less than two decades has not merely violated women as experts- since their expertise in agriculture is related to modelling agriculture on nature's system of renewability.[90]

She believes that women have been instrumental in the evolution of agriculture in the world. Most of the farmers have been women; they have the skill and knowledge that is required for farming and tending the fields. And what grows in these farms usually determines the security of the lives that are intimately connected with the woman and her work in the field. Shiva writes: "Women also make the most significant contribution to food security by producing more than half the world's food, and providing more than 80 percent of the food

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ed. Karen J. Warren (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 27.

[89] Rudolf Bahro. *From Red to Green? How the Financial Credit Crunch Could Bankrupt the Environment* (London: Verso Publication, 1984), 211.

[90] Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited,2010), x.

needs of food insecure households and regions."[91] She further emphasises the importance of women's work in the fields. She believes that there is a direct link between food security and women's food producing capacity. She feels that when women's access to the field is constrained it affects erosion of food security. The worst affected are the poorest parts of the region. And in *Nectar in a Sieve* we soon encounter a similar situation. When the factory takes possession of the lands, when the male members are gone into the factory productions as labours and her access to her land is restricted, tragedy befalls on them. From starvation, malnutrition to death Rukmani has to witness every tragic event.

Shiva sees women who work in nature as agriculturists, water resource manager and traditional natural scientists[92]. She thinks that women's knowledge as agriculturalists is based on the diversity of natural ecosystems. Such knowledge systems do not perceive nature or the land as something to be exploited for more and more profit. Maintaining the natural diversity is important as it sustains the land's potency. Rukmani's work reflects that. A nature based living has shaped her understanding of how the land works. Many think that the shift in the perspective of nature from "mother" to "matter" is a positive change. But when nature is treated as an object of exploitation and violation with force and cruelty we see that this shift is repressive and violent.

Modernity, in terms of a global and profit oriented economy, not only takes away one of the sources of livelihood from women, it also makes women's work in the field and within the household invisible. The problem is women's work in modern economy falls outside the peripheries of profit. As women's work mostly goes without recognition and thereby unpaid (or underpaid), her contribution is not taken seriously. It is impossible to miss gender bias intertwined within the economic systems. The importance of women's work in sustaining

[91] Shiva, *Staying Alive*, ix.

[92] Shiva, *Staying Alive*. Introduction.

families is undeniable. In terms of modern, capitalist economy women's work is looked upon as valueless. Man's work on the other hand continues to be considered valuable in shaping the economy. Vandana Shiva writes: "The invisibility of women's work and knowledge arises from the gender bias which has a blind spot for realistic assessment of women's contribution. It is also rooted in the sectoral, fragmented and reductionist approach to development which treats forests, livestock and crops as independent of each other.[93] Woman's work in the field remains invisible despite their contribution. As this remains unrecognized their work is mostly unrecorded as 'serious work' by economists. There is a reason behind this non-recognition which Shiva points out in her book, *Staying Alive*. She writes: "It is also related to the fact that although women work to sustain their families and communities, most of their work is not measured in wages. Women's work is also invisible because they are concentrated outside market-related or remunerated work."[94]

Rukmani's story in *Nectar in a Sieve* takes place at a time of transformation for a country and for its people. The post-independence time is a turbulent period in history. There so much is happening around Rukmani and she is blissfully unaware of the political upheaval. The turbulence does not touch her life and she spends peaceful years with her husband and her children. With the opening of the tannery factory in the village out skirts the lives of the village people begin to change for the worse. Amidst such drastic changes, Rukmani's bond with her land remains as strong as ever and that is why she could foresee the future of the development project. Other women could not measure the implications of the newly implemented developmental project. There are characters like Kunthi, Kali, Janaki and other women in the village who welcome the new addition to their land. Kunthi in particular is happy to see foreigners in her village. She, unlike Rukmani, fails to understand that when

[93] Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, 167.

[94] Shiva, *Staying Alive*, x.

an agricultural system is overshadowed by industries overnight, devastating consequences occur: starvation, death and mass migration. Kunthi and Rukmani are contrasting characters. Kunthi welcomes the change and in the end her life is ruined beyond repair. Her illusions regarding the project of modernity cause her downfall. On the other hand, Rukmani's attitude towards industry remains sceptical and her knowledge gives her strength. That is why she emerges victorious. Vandana Shive explains woman's reaction to the changes that disrupt the harmony in nature: "They respect and celebrate earth's sacredness, and resist its transformation into dead, raw material for industrialization and commodity production."[95] Rukmani's efforts in saving the seeds become a source of hope when the land is ravaged by flood and later in the novel by draught. When women conserve resources they conserve the hope for the future, the wellbeing of her family, her children. When women work with hands, without the aid of the machines the foods retain more nutrients, protein, fat and mineral. When modernisation enters the village we witness masculinisation of the resources that minimises women's access in the fields.

Shiva understands the importance of saving the organic seeds. She knows that as long as the organic seeds remain in the hands of the farmers their control over their lands cannot be seized. The same practice is carried on by Rukmani. She saves the seeds and thereby saves the diversity and maintains the natural balance of the soil and its potency. And diversity in turn saves the women. By working in the gardens, in the fields they produce fruits and veggies that sustain the family, provide the essentials; most importantly give women economic access and thereby give a sense of freedom and worth. As long as the women are custodians of the seeds they have control over their lives and the lives of those who depend on them. She remains outside of the systematic, skilled labour systems of capitalism and yet her work is capable of sustaining the families and harmony of nature. Shiva focuses on the

[95]Mies and Shive, *Ecofeminism*, 19.

"sacredness" of seeds. For her the seed encompasses everything. It is the seeds and their diversity that control climactic changes, maintain the planet's harmony, sustain productivity. Crop diversity and soil fertility are synonymous. But when diversity is controlled by capitalists by removing women from saving their knowledge and preservation of seeds they cripple the self-sustaining system. Modernity destroys the self-sustaining system by gaining control over the seeds. This creates a trap for the farmers as they now have to buy seeds from the market. These seeds are genetically modified and are produced by multi-national companies. This loss of control over the organic seeds forces the farmers to participate in the capitalist system that turns agriculture into an industry. Rukmani's work in the garden and her protest against the establishment of the tannery in her village reminds us how Eaubonne, the proponent of Western ecofeminist theory, sees women as the gardeners of the world.[96] Women work in nature by maintaining the fine balance. And that is why Eaubonne thinks that when protests erupt against governmental bodies or big corporate houses they are always leading the protest. Eaubonne further thinks that there is a fundamental difference in protests led by women and protests led by men. The difference lies in the goal of protests that involves the benefit not only of women's but also of nature.

Women and their labour is looked upon as inferior as she is the different 'other' in the capitalist system, a system based on the private ownership and control of the means of production and their operation for profit. Much like the labour of women is deemed valueless, bio-diversity is also considered valueless in the dominant system. There is no commercial value in either women's work or biodiversity. Biodiversity is the biological variety and variability of life on earth. Biodiversity refers to every living organism on earth: plants, animals, bacteria and humans. For a capitalist order, biodiversity does not assure profit for

[96] Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, "Introduction," in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy,* ed. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 17.

big corporations. Cash cropping, an agricultural crop which is grown to sell for profit, is beneficial for the capitalist order. The female protagonist in *Nectar in a Sieve* Rukmani advocates bio-diversity. Her daily work, her survival, and the survival of the marginal groups and communities depend upon bio-diversity. The knowledge of these peripheral communities regarding the importance of bio-diversity is looked upon as valueless as it promotes a different value system from the dominant capitalist system. For these communities harmony in nature, a healthy ecosystem, bio-diversity are more important than control over nature. This goes against the values of capitalist patriarchy that sees domination over nature as necessary means of progress and development. It strives to use nature so that nature can become profitable. As a land's natural diversity in producing different types of crops proves to be valueless in capitalist order, it uses agricultural land for cash-cropping or monoculture. Monoculture is the cultivation of single crop species in a specific area. It is done by companies for profit by destroying a land's natural potency that sustains crop diversity. Chemical fertilisers are used in such crop cultivation (cash cropping or monoculture). The effect of the monoculture on land is twofold. First, it destroys the fertile grounds and makes it depend on further chemical use. Second, it destroys lives that depend on the land. Women's lives are significantly affected when bio-diversity is threatened. Capitalism creates a chain of exploitation and destruction. One change leads to another change and all are tied up. Shiva writes: "Diversity is the principle of woman's work and knowledge. This is why they have been discounted in the patriarchal calculus. Yet it is also the matrix from which an alternative calculus of production and skills can be built that respects, not destroys diversity."[97]

Shiva believes that science and technology have turned woman's knowledge of farming and her skills of productivity invisible by ignoring the dimension of diversity in

[97] Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva , *Ecofeminism* (New Delhi: Rawat Publication,2010), 165.

agriculture.[98] A similar observation has been made by Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha in their book *Ecology and Equity* (1995). They explain that rotational production of cereals and legumes with the use of cattle dung manure is the key to healthy agriculture. The diversity of crop variety is the source of the land's fertility as well as the sustainability of the farmer's community. When homogeneous crop production is introduced it requires heavy doses of nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorus and intensive application of weed-killers, insecticides and fungicides. It kills the soil's natural capacity to produce crop and at the same time, it dismantles small scale economy that thrives on diversity and proves to be beneficial for the farmers as well. Gadgil and Guha while commenting on the effects of the single crop production write: "The result is a great scarcity of pulses, a sharp rise in their prices and protein deprivation for the poor."[99]

These above observations when analysed in the case of Rukmani, the female protagonist of *Nectar in a Sieve*, we come to realise that Rukmani possesses an eco-consciousness that goes sharply against the attitude of the implementers the modernity in her village. It is her bond with the land that made her particularly apprehensive about the new invasion in her world. She sees how the industry is changing the lives of the villagers. Gradually it changes the local economy and that affects women's connection to their land. The changed economy forces her to alter her ways with the land where she works. This invariably results in the malnutrition of her children. This eventually leads to death. Rukmani loses her youngest boy to malnutrition. Finally, it results in the displacement of the villagers. Rukmani has to leave land to which she is so deeply attached. When her land, the last resort she has of having a life of her own choice is gone she has no other way but to leave for the city. The land as well as the lives of the poor villagers is ravaged by the tannery. The lands

[28]Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited,2010).

[99] Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *Ecology and Equity: The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 28.

are taken away from the villagers, the peace is lost, and nature is left barren as the birds are no longer coming to the village except for few scavenging birds.

Progress, development, and then devastation, prostitution and displacement-this is how things unfold in the village after modernisation enters it. As soon as the land with which the lives of the women are closely tied up is ravaged by modernity, women's lives too are deeply shattered. Ira and Kunthi turn to prostitution in order to sustain themselves and to provide food for the children. In the previous structure when the local economy worked around women and her labour in nature she could feed herself and her family well. However, in today's capitalist patriarchal society, when land is stolen and men are obliged to labour, women are left in a defenceless position. Their job is no longer valued, and they must now accept capitalism's operating principles. In the novel, there is an undeniable link between capitalism and the flesh trade. Rukmani's friend Kunthi and daughter Ira both are forced into prostitution for survival. Both women and nature are seen within the capitalist order as commodities to possess and exploit. Capitalism creates this complex web that is structured around money, profit, exploitation and domination. Women and nature become entangled in this weird web and have no choice but to submit. The two are thereby linked with a common thread of oppression. The more money capitalists make to feed their greed, the more people suffer, with women and children bearing the brunt of it.

Ecofeminism at its core is a critique of the idea of modernity which claims man's supremacy over non-human nature. Man has come to dominate nature as a resource and the same power is exerted towards all sections that he sees as inferior. Ecofeminists thus clearly mention that beyond the culturally conceived woman-nature connections we need to see how power politics have created another bond-the shared oppression of both women and nature. Deborah Jonson in her essay, *In Search of Common Grounds: An Ecofeminist Inquiry into Christa Wolf's Work* (1998) writes:

> Common to all varieties of ecofeminism is a critical awareness of the connection between the domination of women and the domination of nature that characterise rationalism. This worldview regards the exploitation of nature as a means to achieve human liberation and relies on a nature-culture dualism that ranks differences instead of valuing them. Adherents of rationalism generally consider themselves superior to non-human life and often by extension to women or other groups they deem closer to nature. Employing the "logic of domination" this perspective maintains the superiority justifies subordination. It prevents its supporters from oppressing the uniqueness of all life forms and sanctions the abuse and neglect of those they regard inferior.[100]

On one hand, we have characters like Rukmani, a village woman, a daughter of a farmer and a wife to another. Her existence is tied up with her land, the nature. She becomes a representational character of village women of post-independence India whose lives are changed beyond recognition because of modernisation. On the other hand, we have characters that emerge way after the independence of India in 1947. India has made significant advancements when evaluated through the lens of modernity. It is now considered as a developing country. However what are the ways in which the relationship between women and nature has altered as a result of development? What is the experience of an urban woman who has never had the same intimate connection with nature as Rukmani? Does she develop a bond as well? In Anita Desai's work *Fire on the Mountain* (2015), we get a few answers.

Nature and Women Connection in Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* (2015):

Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* (2015) revolves around the character of Nanda Kaul. She is an urban woman. She has experienced sporadic encounters with the natural world during her formative years. She has been married to a Vice Chancellor of an institution and lived most of her life as a shadow of her husband. Now she is a widow. Her children are all well settled in life and she finally is able to live her life as she desires. She decides to embrace a lifestyle

[23]Deborah Jonson, "In Search of Common Grounds: An Ecofeminist Inquiry into Christa Wolf's work," in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, ed. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 173.

immersed in the natural environment. Nanda settles in a secluded bungalow named Carignano in Kausali. From the very beginning of the narrative, we see that she is troubled by outsiders and prefers to be alone. She wishes to have a quiet, reclusive life, soaked in the mystery and magic of the mountains. She no longer identifies with the metropolitan environment and avoids it. The idea of 'leisure' has been explored by ecofeminists as a means of resistance the patriarchal forces. Karen M. Fox in *Ecofeminism- Women, Culture and Nature* writes:

> Leisure is a concern for ecological feminism because it is integral to a healthy and self affirming lifestyle, provides a context for or connection with the natural environment for women, and may provide one more avenue for resisting domination and sustaining cultural traditions vital to the survival of nature, women, and other groups. It becomes important to understand and analyze women and the environment in terms of leisure because leisure is one important way women resist oppression joyfully. Leisure is much more than a luxury; it is essential for women's health and survival as well as for their connection to the natural environment.[101]

The world of Nanda is a private world and her connection with nature is explored in that private realm which bears little similarity with the world of Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve*. Rukmani belongs to rural India whereas Nanda is an urban woman. Anuradha Roy's Maya is also an urban women like Nanda but her story is very different from Nanda's. Maya's journey revolves around people whose lives are deeply connected with nature. These people work within nature and thus when nature is affected by commercialisation, the lives of the village people get affected too. In turn, it affects Maya's life. Nanda's life in particular is not directly affected by what happens outside. It is her inner world that is impacted by memory, nostalgia and loneliness. Nanda has left her mundane world behind and seeks rest, solace in nature. Her bond with nature intensifies with her willingness to escape the modern and urban world. It is in nature that she finally receives mental peace and emotional stability.

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[101] Karen M. Fox, "Leisure: Celebration and Resistance in the Ecofeminist Quilt,"in *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture and Nature*, ed. Karen J. Warren (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 170.

Women and the 'Garden':

The female characters in the novels can be seen as representatives of the nature that surrounds them. For example 'the garden' that appears in few of the novels seems to reflect the women who have created it, nurtured it or formed a connection with it. In *The Folded Earth* (2011) the garden that Maya has is unorganised, chaotic and wild. Maya herself is a wild soul. She time and again revolts against patriarchy by going against the will of her father; she marries against his will, and she even refuses to be a part of his business. The garden owned by Maya serves as a representation of her inner essence, reflecting her defiance of patriarchal norms and her will to lead a self-determined existence. In *Nectar in a Sieve* Rukmani's garden is a place of abundance. The fruits, the veggies that she grows symbolises her coming into being a woman, capable of creating new life. Her relationship with her garden is multi-dimensional: it symbolises her maturity, her capability to bear and sustain life and her power to support her family financially. It also symbolises the life-bearing and life-sustaining nature that surrounds her. The garden on the material level proves to be a source of profit and nourishment. It empowers Rukmani by granting her agency over her own life, the lives of her children, and the potential to enhance their standard of living. But there is another bond between women and nature that cannot be explained in mere materialistic terms. Her growth from a woman to a mother, her swelling belly, the life present within her, all find expression in the abundance of her garden. We realise that mother earth and Rukmani both share a deeper bond: both are life-giving and life-sustaining entities. We also begin to see that there is no hierarchy amidst life on earth, all elements are connected and depend on each other. Ynestra King expresses the same view that life on earth is an "interconnected web"; there is no hierarchy in nature. The hierarchy is projected on nature by humans and this justifies social domination. According to King ecofeminist practice is fundamentally anti-

hierarchical.[102] Vandana Shiva feels that the reductionist paradigm of the modern world does not perceive the interconnectedness of nature and all its beings. And this is why it also fails to acknowledge woman's work in partnership with nature and their holistic and ecological knowledge of nature's processes.[103]

In contrast to Rukmani's garden, we have the garden of Nanda in *Fire on the Mountain* (2015). It is rugged, almost lifeless. The little existing life forms are the gliding eagles, a few mountain lizards, and the silent pine trees. She desires nothing more than this. She is disturbed by life and the mayhem it eventually brings. As a result, she has no desire to grow trees in her garden or care for the nests that support life. Her mental state is mirrored in her garden. She wants to forget about her past, the recollections of a difficult life she lived in her husband's house. She used to have a lot of people around her; her days were spent in serving these people, in taking care of their needs. As a result, when she eventually finds time to live her life alone and for herself, she no longer desires human company; she despises the clamour and commotion that people produce: "She had drifted about the garden. Unlike any other owner of house and garden, she had not said: Here I will plant a willow, there I will pull out the Spanish broom and put in pampas grass instead. No, she revelled in its bareness, its emptiness."[104]

Nanda's garden serves as a metaphor for herself. It is simple, calm, barren, and vacant. Nanda is precisely like this. She has reached the point in her life where she doesn't want to nourish life any longer. She, like her garden, has reached a point in her life when she feels barren, a barrenness that promises serenity. She is no longer bound by her job, duties,

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[102] Ynestra King, "The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology." In *Reading in Ecology and Feminist Theology*, ed. Mary Heather MacKinnon and Moni McIntyre (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995), 150,151.

[103] Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive* (New Delhi: Woman Unlimited, 2004).

[104] Anita Desai, *Fire on the Mountain* (Haryana: Random House India, 2015), 33.

responsibilities, or obligations. She's now only the bare bones of a personality that characterises Nanda, an exhausted lady yearning for solitude. Desai's approach to exhibit the woman-nature bond is different from Kamala Markandaya and Anuradha Roy's as all these three women novelists present the connection from three different perspectives and thereby significantly contribute to our understanding of the multiplicity of nature-woman connection within an Indian context. The female protagonists depicted in these novels hail from various social backgrounds, thereby providing us with an opportunity to analyze and comprehend the multifaceted relationship between women and environment. There is no one coherent relationship. While one enjoys viewing nature's bounty, the other wishes for nature's barrenness. Nanda, the central character, longs for a life in recluse in Kausali. Desai writes: "Everything she wanted was here, at Carignano, in Kasauli. Here, on the ridge of the mountain, in this quiet house. It was the place, and the time of life, that she had wanted and prepared for all her life.[105] Nanda's willingness to be in the wild, her desire to grow into a tree, demonstrates that she is willing to separate herself from people and the plains she calls home. Her desire for a quiet life stems from a lengthy period of oppression and exploitation at the hands of her spouse. She was the picture of perfection as a wife and mother, and she did everything a Vice-Chancellor's wife is required to do. She no longer agrees to be the perfect wife at the expense of her goals and wishes for a more independent existence. Her husband has passed away, and her children have settled down nicely. In the alpine village, she now seeks serenity and a life of her own. What pleased her and satisfied her so, here at Carignano, was its barrenness: this was the chief virtue of all Kasauli of course- its starkness.[106]

[105] Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, 3.

[106] Desai, *Fire on the Mountain,* 3

Nature: A Sanctuary of Peace, A Haven of Freedom:

Nanda wants to be like a tree, silent yet sturdy in her stance. The rocks, bare soil, sun-baked grass, and tall pines all appeal to her because they are serene. City life might give comfort and luxury, but it can also create a strong desire to get away from it all. The mechanical life, coupled with the pressure to be perfect at all times, might lead to a desire to abandon everything, with nature appearing to be the only option, a potential solution to all of her problems. In case of Maya, in *The Folded Earth* and Nanda in *Fire on the Mountain* this happens. Maya is exhausted from being a perfect daughter of a man who forces his ideas and desires on her. In the case of Nanda, it is her husband who compels her to follow his ways and forbids her to have an identity of her own. Both these women are city born and have an urban upbringing and both are deeply dissatisfied with their lives. Both find solace in the mountain villages: for Maya it is Ranikhet and for Nanda it is Kausali.

These two female characters have a lot in common, but they also share a great deal of dissimilarity when it comes to their relationship with nature. Maya is deeply concerned with the lives of the people in her community. She develops a human-nature perspective as a result of her comprehension of the lives and issues of the locals. In the instance of Nanda, though, the connection is more personal. She isn't looking for human companionship. Nature is what draws her in and provides her with serenity. The memory of a tortured life as the wife of a Vice-Chancellor, the monotony of playing the role of a perfect mother and host day in and day out and to serve, give and sacrifice for her family make her intolerant towards anything that reminds her of the life she had. Her relationship with nature is unique in the sense that it is unlike the relationship shared by Rukmani or Maya. The surrounding environment that Rukmani or Maya inhabit is not something that they consciously choose. It is never a matter of choice but compulsion. Nanda on the other hand, consciously chooses to be in that specific mountain village, far from her familiar world that she has deliberately left behind.

In this wild nature she time and again travels to her past, a life of busy schedules and of unending housework. Even when she no longer is a part of that urban class in the low-lands her memories refuse to let her go. And thus sometimes the abundance of life around her in the hills seems overwhelming. She seeks stillness, quietude in nature. The domestic life imprisoned her and the life in nature frees her from the duties, the obligations of the wife, of the mother. She is fed up with following orders and obeying her spouse. She only wants calm and a lifeless, barren landscape. She is drawn to an eagle, a reptile, the rocky mountain, the harsh sun, and the lifeless silence. Even the sounds of the birds distract her from her desire for a solitary existence. This is how she communicates with the natural world. The relationship is one-of-a-kind in that it never claims to have formed spontaneously. We do not get the impression that Nanda's bond with nature is sacred or formed by materiality. It is a dependence that results from her hatred of patriarchy, and her refusal to accept her role prescribed by society.

Nanda wants to be like the eagle gliding across the sky. In sharp contrast to the image of the eagle, we have the image of the cuckoo, calling in her garden. The call of the cuckoo is a reminder of the domestic life she had in her husband's house. This image is deeply suggestive of what she wants and what she is forced to have. She longs for a life that no longer demands her absolute attention, her relentless work as a wife, a life without compulsions and obligations. But the call of the cuckoo distracts her from her wish to become the eagle, the fierce bird, free and indomitable, unlike the cuckoo. The arrival of Raka, her granddaughter again forces her to live a life she no longer wants:

> Now, to bow again, to let that noose slip once more round her neck that she had thought was freed fully, finally. Now to have those wails and bawls shattered rip her still house to pieces, to clutter the bare rooms and the cool tiles with the mountainous paraphernalia that each child seems to require or anyway demand. Now to converse again when it was silence she wished, to question and follow up and make sure of another's life and comfort and order, to involve oneself, to involve another.

> It seemed hard, it seemed unfair, when all she wanted was the sound of the cicadas and the pines, the sight of this gorge plunging, blood-red, down to the silver plain.[107]

The character of Raka is another significant female character in the sense that it presents a contrast to the character of Nanda Kaul. This is necessary from an ecofeminist perspective to view these two characters and analyse them. Despite belonging to the same class, they react to nature differently. While Nanda is happy just to stay within her starkly barren garden and bungalow, Raka on the other hand is eager to explore nature. Both are victims of upper class hypocrisies. The hollowness of mechanical modern lifestyles frustrates them. Both Nanda and Raka consider nature as their escape route. Their willingness to get rid of the dreary upper class society brings them close to nature. Yet they connect to it in two different ways. The following lines show how these two characters connect to nature differently: "If Nanda Kaul was a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation, her great-granddaughter was a recluse by nature, by instinct. She had not arrived at this condition by a route of rejection and sacrifice-she was born to it, simply.[108]

Women Up Against Modernity:

Raka is a free soul. Unlike the obedient housewife Nanda, Raka likes to explore nature. She is constantly moved by the beauty and the little surprises that nature offers. She is young and that is why the wildness appeals so much to her. She lets herself be carried away in nature. She disappears time and again in search of little treasures that she finds in nature. Through the search, she tries to find herself. Her adventures sometimes leave her bruised, stung by insects and yet nothing seems to stop her from going into nature. Raka first discovers the changes in the natural surroundings. The subtle signs of modernity have started to creep in

[107] Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, 20.

[108] Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, 53.

the mountain region and Raka observes that. Raka's connection to nature makes her conscious of the changes. She understands the potential implications of these alterations. It would significantly disrupt the serenity of the mountain region, leading to the contamination of the land, the water and the air. In her comprehension and concern for nature, she reveals herself to be a sensitive individual who can discern the detrimental effects on the environment resulting from the process of modernisation. Nanda is blissfully oblivious to the changes that are taking place around her. Nanda and Raka are in fact distinct personalities. However, both are making a concerted effort to close a gap that has been between them for a long time. The attempt is the outcome of a bond that they both have with nature. They develop a strong bond due to their mutual affinity for the natural world and their shared commitment to its preservation. Nanda talks about a cottage that has now been taken away by doctors of the Pasture Institute. This is an institute which she addresses as a reflection of the monstrosity of science. She compares it with an atomic reactor that can any time destroy the village. She also talks of a Garden House that has now turned into an Army office. Nanda is not happy about the invasion into this beautiful Garden House. She says: "Too many tourists. Too many armies. How they are ruining this-this quiet place."[109]

We are at once reminded of Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth* (2010) where Roy criticises modernity that glorifies the army, the state power. We witness that to give the army a stronghold, nature is constantly being sacrificed. Natural balance, the sanity of the ecosystem is all put in danger when the army is given a chance to stay, to thrive. Wild nature is being tamed by modernity so that it matches the organised and disciplined way of life of the army. For Maya and for Nanda this is unacceptable. 'A Shame' as Nanda puts it. What is interesting here is that Nanda and Raka both share one common thing: their concern for the ecology, for the nature. It is in this shared concern for nature that they ultimately meet. They no longer

[109] Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, 63.

seem distant from each other, they are now companions in their shared consciousness: an eco-consciousness: “Raka, you really are a great-grandchild of mine, aren’t you? You are more like me than any of my children or grandchildren. You are exactly like me.”[110]

The female protagonists in the narrative establish varying connections with nature, each motivated by distinct factors. When natural resources are exploited, their response tends to be more pronounced compared to others. Raka is seen to be extremely eager to go out to explore the areas affected by the forest fire. What she witnesses leaves her deeply affected. The burnt-up houses, the broken doors and window panes, the shattered glasses, and the utter destruction of the whole area fill her with a sense of awe. The sight of the ravaged place seems to have a mystery of its own. Everything appeared as “illegitimate, uncompromising and lawless”[111]. The world that she witnesses now stands as a sharp contrast to the world that she has known for a long time. This contrast pulls her more to come and to connect to the mountains. Just beside a ravaged house, there stands a half-built house in the process of making. She can now see how people in this region of the world coexist with nature. They are at the mercy of nature; they are aware that nature may be ferocious, but they are also aware that nature will provide for them. She is drawn to nature's cycle of destruction and the simultaneous process of creation. She wants to be a part of the destruction and re-construction of things. Nature's strength is awe-inspiring. Raka's prior world is a futuristic one, filled with technical marvels and mechanical conveniences: “It was the ravaged, destroyed and barren spaces in Kasauli that drew her: the ravine where yellow snakes slept under grey rocks and agaves growing out of the dust and rubble, the skeletal pines that rattle

[110] Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, 71.

[111] Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, 99.

in the wind- levelled hilltops and seared remains of the safe, cosy, civilised world in which Raka had no part and to which she owned no attachment."[112]

When the wild nature is threatened by modernity Raka is the one who reacts immediately and more spontaneously than her grandmother. There is undoubtedly a difference in the temperaments of these two women characters. The difference surfaces more prominently when they share their memories of childhood. Nanda had a lavish life in Kashmir. She recollects her days of freedom and peace in her ancestral home in Kashmir. Everything about her life seems to be a happy memory even her memory of having caged animals now gives her joy. But for Raka, the thought of having helpless animals locked in cages for the amusement of humans appears deeply repulsive. Here lies a contrast in responses towards nature in these two seemingly similar women. This difference in attitude needs to be noted when we talk about the ecofeminist theory in general. Not all respond to nature and its exploitation in the same manner. So when we strive to outline the theoretical framework of ecofeminism in the context of the Third World we need to remember that such differences exist. Nanda doesn't seem to be concerned over animal rights but Raka in spite of having an upbringing in a wealthy household in a modern city is visibly uncomfortable about Nanda's story of caged animals. Raka directs our attention to the factory that dominates the landscape. Raka also directs our attention to the exploitation of the animals in the factory. Desai writes: "Puzzled, Raka turned her head on its stalk, gently. Her father and grandmother had extolled the beauties and delights of a Himalayan hill- station to her, but said nothing of factories. Here was such an enormous one that Raka wondered at their ignorance of it. To her, it seemed to dominate the landscape- a square dragon, boxed, bricked and stoked."[113]

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[112] Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, 100.

[113] Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, 46

Raka inquires about the smoke coming from the factory to Ram Lal, the caretaker of Carignano. Ram Lal informs:

> That is the Pasteur Institute. It is where doctors make serum for injections. When a man is bitten by a mad dog, he is taken there for injections- fourteen, in the stomach. I've had them myself. Once a whole village was rounded up and taken there- a dog had gone mad and bitten everyone in the village. The dog had to be killed. Its head was cut off and sent to the institute. The doctors cut open and look into them. They have rabbits and guinea pigs there, too, many animals. They use them for tests.[114]

The exploitation of animals within the chemical industry clearly surfaces in these lines.

While Raka and her adventures end up raising valuable questions regarding animal rights, a very important ecofeminist concern, Ila Das, a friend of Nanda raises important questions about modernity and urbanity. Like both the other women characters Ila too had an urban upbringing. When she experiences loss of control over her assets and financial resources, she subsequently retreats to the mountains. Here she realises that her urban upbringing hasn't done much good for her. It has crippled her in the sense that she can no longer rely entirely on herself and nature for survival. The self-sustaining life choices are absent in the city. One must submit to the technologies which are affordable if one has money. Ila lacks it. She is saved when she arrives at the Himalayan foothills to work with the marginal communities. She is saved both financially and morally. She comes to an understanding that the lives of these people are in no way inferior. On the contrary, she feels that these people live a much happier and fulfilling life. They do not depend on advances of modernity rather they depend on their capability to provide for themselves in nature. Thus a bond with nature develops. The mutual cooperation guarantees the survival of both. When considering the experiences of individuals facing adversity and their relationship with the natural world, one is reminded of the notable work of Desai, specifically *Village by the Sea* (1984). It is a different story than that of Nanda or Raka. The central women characters

[114] Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, 48

belong to the marginal sections of society. They are poor; they are struggling to keep themselves alive every day. In such a setting Desai gives us exceptional women characters who connect to nature in more fundamental ways. The first description of the connection is purely spiritual. The women along with Lila, the female protagonist, are going to worship a cluster of rocks near the sea. Without any aid of a purohit or a priest, or elaborate offerings they go to the rocks and offer a few flowers: "Cluster of three rocks. One of them was daubed with red and white powder. It was the sacred rock, a kind of temple in the sea...Lila took the flowers from her basket and scattered them about the rock, then folded her hands and bowed."[115]

Nature and Women Connection in Anita Desai's *Village by the Sea* (2015):

The simplicity of worshipping the rocks presents a picture of how these poor women of a village connect to nature with spontaneity. But to say that it is the only way that these women relate to nature would be wrong. Desai carefully juxtaposes two different nature-woman connections in the very beginning of her novel: one spiritual and the other material. Lila is shown to be worshipping the rocks which her father used to worship. Now that he has sold his boat to pay off his debts, he is unable to work. He has been compelled to lock himself away behind the four walls of his home due to his helplessness. These men's lives are inextricably linked to the water. Thus the materialist dimension of human-nature bond cannot be overlooked. The mention of debt is significant in that it exposes us to the realities of the village household. The vicious cycle of economy, growth and progress has engulfed the lives of the poor fishermen much like the farmers of Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve.* There is another mention of a spiritual connection of women with nature. It is the worshipping of a basil plant by women of the village: "But large or small, rich or poor, each had a sacred basil

[115] Anita Desai, *The Village by the Sea* (New Delhi: random House India, 1984), 1.

plant growing in a pot by the front door. Children and mongrels were playing in the dust, women were cleaning rice or throwing out pails of dirty water into the lane."[116]

Worshipping of the basil plant as sacred is part of Hindu tradition. Ecofeminists agree on the fact that many Eastern cultures and traditions worship nature as divine. They believe that this worshipping of nature works towards preserving it.[117] Women play a crucial role in this context, as they are responsible for performing the ritualistic act of worshiping the plant. A parallel can be observed between the early practice of rock worship and the subsequent mention of a revered basil plant. These rituals are commonly performed, predominantly by women. This is a crucial component of spiritual ecofeminism. Desai frequently refers to such modest rural rituals, and in doing so, she successfully initiates talks about spiritual ecofeminism in an Indian context. An ecofeminist perspective like this is based on an immanent spirituality rather than a transcendent spirituality. Deborah Jonson sites Starhawk in this regard and says: "Instead of viewing God as a father who looms above us in heaven, Starhawk believes in a divinity that is within and around us, in nature."[118]

The significance of such a worldview lies in the acceptance of all sentient beings as equal and in the rejection of any hierarchical scheme of things. The idea of divinity amidst nature and in all of its beings prevents the hierarchical ranking that allows people to consider themselves superior to those who are of different ethnicity, class, gender and race. Starhawk writes in her essay- *Power, Authority and Mystery: Ecofeminism and Earth-based Spirituality* (1998): "When the spirit is immanent, when each of us is the Goddess, is God, we have an inalienable right to be here and to be alive. We have a value that can't be taken away from us,

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[116] Anita Desai, *The village by the Sea*, 37.

[117] Dorceta E. Taylo, "Women of Color, Environmental Justice, and Ecofeminism,"in *Feminism: Women, Culture Nature*, ed. Karen J Warren (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 66.

[118] Deborah Jonson. "In Search of Common Grounds: An Ecofeminist Inquiry into Christa Wolf's work." In *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, edited by Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 181.

that doesn't have to be earned, that doesn't have to be acquired."[119] The idea of regenerating this manifestation of the divine principle in our psyche, as well as the feminine principle in nature, has been important for spiritual ecofeminists. Spiritual ecofeminism is largely supported by both Starhawk in America and Shiva in India. Both women and nature are seen as components of the same feminine force, and hence promote the idea of connection. The examples in literature of Spiritual ecofeminism abound: the worshipping of rocks by local women *in Village by the Sea*, Rukmani'g garden experience in *Nectar in a Sieve*, Maya's moments of solace in nature and Nanda's identification with a rugged nature in novels like *The Folded Earth* and *Fire on the Mountain* reveal many shades of nature-women connection that can be explained in terms of spiritual experience in nature. Vandana Shiva writes: "Women in India are an intimate part of nature, both in imagination and in practice. At one level nature is symbolised as the embodiment of the feminine principle and at another, she is nurtured by the feminine to produce life and provide sustenance."[120]

Carolyn Merchant in her book *Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (1990) draws a parallel between the Eastern and Western cultures while talking about the concept of "female principle".[121] In Eastern culture the perception of a female principle in nature is an age old concept and has become a part of social life. The perception of a female earth at the centre of the cosmos is a part of Western philosophies that can be traced back to ancient Western systems that formed the ideological framework of the sixteenth century. Within such an ideological system nature is perceived in two ways: first, as a nurturing mother and second, as chaotic and wild. As mechanistic science progressed the

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[119] Starhawk, "Power, Authority, and Mystery: Ecofeminism and Earth – Based Spirituality," in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, ed. Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990), 76.

[120] Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited,2004), 38.

[121] Carolyn Merchant, *Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1990), 24.

first view of nature as a nurturing entity that needs to be protected subsided. The second view of nature as chaotic has gained acceptance. In such a view the necessity to tame a wild nature becomes urgent.[122] Thus domination of nature and mastery over it becomes principal aim of modernity. With the modernisation of the world and the scientific revolution, the concepts of a living earth, living nature come to be disqualified; because the idea of 'mother earth' would create problems for exploitative market economies as it is unethical to slay one's life-giver, caring mother. This is why the ecofeminists emphasise regenerating the idea of a living earth or a divine female principle in nature.[123] When one perceives nature as living and divine one works towards saving it. It has to be mentioned here that the way ecofeminism talks of saving the earth is different from the romantic notion of a helpless nature that can be saved by men. It would be wrong to assume that spiritual ecofeminism advocates first the notion of "Mother Earth". It is not a new concept; it occupied the public consciousness since late 1960s when the world became aware of natural degradation because of modernity. This popular representation of "Mother Nature" has come from the romantic tradition based on the male, disembodied fantasy of nature as the ideal woman. Nature is now looked upon as a woman in danger and is in urgent need to be protected from mankind's inability to restrict itself. Behind this idea of a helpless nature there lies a danger as Chaia Heller comments: "it (the idea of a helpless nature) ignores the parallel devaluation of women. Romantic ecology fails to challenge the patriarchal state and capitalist ideologies and institutions of domination to legitimize the denigration of women."[124]

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[122] Merchant, *Death of Nature*, 38.

[123] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Ecofeminism: First And Third World Women," American Journal of Theology & Philosophy 18, no. 1 (January 1997): URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/27944009

[124] Chaia Heller, "For the Love of Nature: Ecology and the Cult of the Romantic," in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, ed. Greta Gaard (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 220.

Nature and Women Connection in Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* (2008):

When we talk about how women authors have dealt with the issue of women's bond with nature Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* (2008) needs to be considered. This particular work presents a female protagonist whose characteristics diverge significantly from those previously examined in this chapter. It is Helen, a white woman who has come to accompany her husband to India. Her character is interesting because she doesn't belong to the land, she is an outsider. And as an outsider her relationship with the foreign land, the people and nature are different than those who have their roots deeply embedded in India and its culture. Her responses are different than her husband's. Mr. Clinton is the chief engineer of a project. The construction of the dam over the river in the southern part of India brings them to India. Clinton is the very prototype of a modern man, the man from the West. He is only preoccupied with the idea of achieving what he aims for: the construction of the dam. He is unaware of the people who are working for him, helping him to realise the dream he harbours. For him, they are only resources. He looks at them and "they all looked the same."[125] They have lost their individuality in the eyes of their white master. Helen, however, connects to them differently: "Helen, his wife, had no such blocks. Was it, he wondered, because she was half his age. When he asked her she laughed. 'It's nothing to do with age. I just think of them as human beings, that's all.'[126]

Even though Helen is a white woman, she is genuinely interested in the lives of the poor locals, the forests, and the land. She is eager to learn about the land and its inhabitants. Clinton, however, does not prevent Helen from meeting the locals and seeing the country, his sole concern is to ensure that Helen does not experience boredom in the unfamiliar setting of India. Helen exhibits an initial attraction to the site. She proceeds to interact with the locals,

[125] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 6.

[126] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 6.

and she quickly learns that the project on which her husband Clinton is working is wreaking devastation on the indigenous people's lives. Helen, who despises the opulent parties and company of the highly arrogant whites, begins to wonder about the whole purpose of modernity, which inevitably exploits marginalised people and the natural world that sustains them. What's fascinating about this white woman who effortlessly connects with individuals who are different from her is that she herself belongs to a class that is thought to be superior to the others. This broadens the scope of ecofeminist philosophy, which considers the racially dominant to be exploitative. By creating characters like Kenny in *Nectar in a Sieve* and Helen in *The Coffer Dams*, Markandaya establishes the possibility that amongst this superior class, there are people who are sympathetic and open towards the struggle of the others. Helen is becoming increasingly conscious of the risks that the project is posing. For Clinton, the initiative is critical. It's the only thing he cares about. He demonstrates a complete lack of awareness regarding the concerns of the local populace. He is unconcerned about the negative consequences such a structure would have on the lives of those who consider nature to be their home. For them, nature is a sacred entity that cannot be violated for man's greed. Helen, on the other hand, was able to recognise these people's connection to their region, their ancestral homeland.

Helen's growing friendship with the people is reflected in her handling of Das, her housekeeper. She discusses the area and the people with him. She never displays any arrogance or pride in her interactions with Das. Das is more like a close confidante to her, someone who listens to her and shares similar interests. Clinton, however, is completely disinterested in the lives of the people of the land. When Helen talks about the coffee plantation of the region Clinton remarks that the people could export them and get rich. What he seems to not know is that the people are so poor that they cannot manage to do that on

their own. Helen's remark, "They cannot afford to"[127] is suggestive of her involvement in the affairs of the locals while her husband is utterly unresponsive towards it.

Helen's concern about the locals further is stressed when she enquires about the broken pieces of pottery near the compound where they are staying. To Clinton, those are just broken, meaningless objects but for Helen, those are testaments of the sufferings of the people who used to live there. This is their land on which the white masters have built their comfortable cottages. Those locals were forced to leave their homeland, their ancestral land because of the land's modernisation in the hands of the white masters. This pains her a lot. But Clinton doesn't even look at the pieces carefully. His response to the questions of Helen shows what exactly is wrong with their perception about the locals: "'I expect they broke them up and buried the lot', said Clinton, 'rather than cart them away. The locals, I mean...some of 'em were camped here before we moved in, I'd quite forgotten that little episode.'"[128] When Helen wants to know where exactly they moved Clinton plainly answers, "I don't know."[129] Clinton's attitude towards the local people is marked by arrogance and a complete lack of respect for them. He simply doesn't know what exactly happened to the people who were forced out of the site and neither he is willing to know.

The entire exchange demonstrates the disparity in attitudes between the husband and the wife. Helen has a clear sense of worry over the displacement experienced by these individuals as a result of the construction. These are the folks Clinton refers to as 'animals'. It's not as though Clinton is completely unaware of the project's impact on the lives of underprivileged indigenous people. He makes the decision not to participate in the peple's hardships. He has chosen not to think of them. But when a white woman like Helen shows

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[127] Kamala Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams* (Navi Mumbai: Penguin Random House, 2008), 22.

[128] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 23.

[129] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 23.

genuine sympathy for the people and doesn't even hesitate to ask questions about the project and its ill effects on the lives of the poor we begin to see a woman, just a woman irrespective of the colour of her skin. She is almost as involved as Rukmani or Maya: "Helen sat on alone in the darkness, turning over in her hands the broken bits of pottery. It had been part of some woman's life once, not long ago: she had filled it with water and scoured it, cooked in it and fed her family."[130]

Helen's sympathy for the women connects her with the displaced people who were uprooted because of modernisation of the land. Her involvement cannot be explained in any other terms other than her feminine instinct that connects her so effortlessly with the tribal women. Again her reaction towards the ill treatment of the people of the land is contradictory to the reactions of her household help Das. Though Das is a local yet he too shows arrogance as the displacement of the indigenous seems to be a no big deal to him. Thus somewhere the men of the house come together in their shared sense of superiority over the poor local tribes. Markandaya further focuses on the complex power equations prevalent in the society: "After a while she opened the door, and stepped out into the blackness where the shadow of the first trees fell and deepened the night."[131]

These lines imply that she is pushing the boundaries. In order to explore the darkness, she widens her thoughts even further. The exploitation of the "other" by modernization has resulted in this darkness. Helen's adventures in the unknown world can likewise be used to explain the gloom. Not everything on this side is glitzy or gleaming. She must confront the truth on this side, as well as realities that are rarely brought to the forefront. Helen begins to communicate with the locals. She even learns the language. What she communicates primarily to the tribal community is how the dam can cause damage to the land and the

[130] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 24.

[131] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 25.

people. She is respectful of the river and the people that depend upon it. Her feelings for the inhabitants of the land contrast sharply with her husband's lack of compassion for them. The spiritual ecofeminists would argue that the cultures that traditionally see divinity in nature find it difficult to exploit it. When societies, on the other hand, regard nature as a barrier to their victory over the globe, they begin to exert control over it through force. Helen's emotional separation from her husband deepens as she grows closer to the locals and becomes more empathetic to their plight. Clinton's refusal to recognise her true involvement with the locals, whom he considers inferior, is the source of the problem. Helen's next big step is her decision to move out of her bungalow and stay in the village. The decision is criticised and even mocked by her associate Mille. But Helen is determined to take the leap into the unknown territories. She refuses to take the help of a guide as she doesn't want anyone to shape her opinion about the place and the people. The first thing she witnesses is the horrible conditions in which the marginal communities survive. In her exploration of the unknown territories, she finds herself alone. People in the beginning couldn't accept her as she is an outsider but gradually Helen finds people around her helping, supporting and opening up to her: "Suddenly, here, there was colour and confusion, an out-flowing warmth to which she responded, matching a flamboyance on offer with a deep quiet pleasure which the tribesman, after initial agony and heart-searching, correctly interpreted as the most extrovert display open to an Englishwoman."[132] She clearly loves being there, amidst the tribals and the locals-she feels the genuine warmth of the people something she has been missing in England. The totality of life astounds her-these people work hard every day to make a living. They are able to sustain and build themselves every day because of their connection to nature: "whole people build whole lives."[133]

[132] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 39.

[133] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 39.

Her involvement with the tribal community surfaces even more strongly when she talks with Bashiam about their forceful resettlement. They are driven out of their land so that the bungalows of the whites can be built. Bashiam's calmness about the whole series of events that force the people to leave their lands disturbs her. Bashiam's blindness angers her. In the moments of heated exchange between these two a question surfaces: Why does Helen care? Helen herself has been asking the question: "His calm unnerved her. Was her own passionate reaction the right one, she wondered, perhaps for these people it wasn't. These people, these people. It jarred her, the ominous, monotonous familiar phrase. So it's getting me too, that old indestructible India bug, she thought with icy dismay."[134] Helen is close to Bashiam. Helen's curiosity and affection for the indigenous community are the reasons behind Helen's closeness with Bashiam. As a result, she develops this one-of-a-kind friendship. Bashiam is portrayed as an outcast in his own village in this scene. Helen, on the other hand, transforms into an insider, with true empathy for the tribal group and their plight making her especially responsive to the plight of the economically disadvantaged locals. Bashiam and Helen are similar in that they have both been able to separate themselves from their own communities and forge their own identities.

Conclusion:

When we talk of women's bond with nature this aspect comes forward that not all share a close bond with nature. Furthermore, the factors that contribute to a woman's connection with nature and people remain largely undetermined. It is not always a matter of only occupation, livelihood, culture or gender in general. Many never develop a connection with nature yet some do share a special bond regardless of their position in the social ladder, their race and class. Helen is a fine example of that. She belongs to the white British race and she doesn't

[134] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 45.

have any prior association with India and its native population. Yet her way of communicating with the locals and their ordeal in the hands of the people of her own class makes her a unique female character. Similar things happen in the case of Maya in *The Folded Earth* and Raka in *Fire on the Mountain.* These women belong to the higher strata of the society. So to presume that women who closely work with nature develop a bond with it would be a misconception. It is rather a matter of consciousness which we can term as eco-consciousness that separates these women from the others who never see nature as more than just a resource. Women like Kunthi in *Nectar in a Sieve*, Charu's mother in *The Folded Earth*, Millie in *The Coffer Dams* never develop an intimate connection with nature. Helen from *The Coffer Dams* is interesting in the sense that she is unlike all the other women characters that reflect a capability to connect with nature. The point of departure is her white lineage. Her exceptional capability to connect to a community of people who are rooted in the Indian soil, the indigenous makes her different from the others. It is Helen more that anyone outside of the community understands the effects of modernisation upon the lands.

Helen possesses a profound intuition and a remarkable capacity for empathy for all living entities. Much like Diwan Sahib in *The Folded Earth* Helen's sympathies are directed towards every creature even the caged bird in the house of Jackson. The freeing of the bird becomes an act of wish fulfilment for Helen who wants to free the caged creatures everywhere:

> The rest she bought and released. An empty gesture, she knew: what of the countless birds that she would not free, for a trade that she could not block? Yet it was valid for her and it had to be made, and at the end when she saw the birds go, fluttering on cramped wings and then soaring up in headlong flight, the academics lapsed and she simply stood holding the empty wicker basket peppered with bird droppings, conscious only of a stretching and a smoothing out of what had been crimped and in spasm within her.[135]

[135] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 102.

At first she releases a number of birds after Jackson chooses two from the local market. This caged bird becomes a metaphor for the people who are caged within ideas of modernity and its implementation and also for Helen herself as she is also caged in a relationship that is emotionally draining. A pair of mynah is caught by Jackson and then he frees one as he has been told that a solitary mynah only sings. Helen frees the bird. But very soon the solitary mynah dies. Both Jackson and Helen prepare to bury it properly. The death of the lonely bird signifies the tragic end of Helen who is left alone emotionally and intellectually. While the burial of the mynah provides some relief to Helen as it symbolises that the bird has been looked upon as a dignified creature. Clinton on the other hand, finds the cross over the burial of the bird as a distraction. This difference in approach is significant. Helen is deeply disturbed by both the act of confining the bird and its subsequent demise, while Clinton, in contrast, stays emotionally unmoved: "So they buried the mynah in a corner of the compound, and presently Jackson marked the grave with a cross. She was glad when he did, in case the gardener's spade did bring up the bones, confirming Jackson in his fears and prejudices. But Clinton was not too pleased. It marred the view from the bungalow, and was not the kind of symbol he liked to see implanted in the home ground of the head of Clinton Mackendrick Co."[136]

Helen's difference with her husband highlights her response that arises out of her consciousness, her awareness of the world where every entity is connected to each other. No one can survive in isolation, the bond is essential for existence. That is why the caging of the birds saddens her. She releases them. And again she participates in the burial of the dead bird as well. The lonely bird dies. This in a way signifies that in nature no one can exist in isolation, the death of the uprooted, isolated is certain. This consciousness makes her realise that she too is part of the bigger nature just as all other entities belong to it. She says: "I

[136] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 104.

belong, I'm not alone. Everything is a part of me, and I'm part of everything-not just a pop-up cardboard figure."[137]

In her realisation she connects to the larger nature. She is part of it. This provides the answers to why and how Helen in spite of being an outsider connects to the nature, the local tribes and poor people. In this context Bashiam serves as a notable contrasting character. He is a member of the local tribal community yet he expresses a favourable disposition towards the process of modernization. Interestingly both Clinton, a white man and Bashiam, a local youth fail to grasp Helen's point of view. The problem lies in ignorance in the case of Bashiam and arrogance in the case of Clinton. She realises negative consequences associated with the process of modernization on both the land and the well-being of the local population. Additionally, she acknowledges the inevitability of progress in the community and its impact on their lives.

Helen's concern for the natives surfaces again when she defends the rights of the locals to do the rituals for the dead. The second disaster has struck the dam site. This time the local workers who have been working on the project face a horrible fate. A large part of the local labourers consists of indigenous people. These people previously have assisted the whites when their men died because of an accident at the construction site. The tribal community has not only rescued the bodies they also agreed to do the last rites for them. But now when their men are dead the authorities refuse to give permission to rescue the bodies. For Helen this atrocity and insensibility of the officers specially of Clinton is hard to accept. She argues with her husband who refuses to get the point: "'they asked for trouble', he (Clinton) said. 'They got what was coming. Naturally they are upset. It is upsetting.'"[138] Clinton is clearly unresponsive to the loss of lives. Helen on the other hand is much more

[137] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 144.

[138] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 185.

emotionally engaged with the locals: "'They are beliefs', she said. 'One does not walk over graves wearing jackboots.'"[139]

Thus what emerges from the study of these women characters is that there exists a multi-dimensional connection between women and nature. Ecofeminists of the West and East have variously described the bonds in their theories. But the literary texts give us something more. Desai, Roy and Markandaya have written before Ecofeminism became an established form of critical thinking. Yet their writings could contribute significantly to the whole theoretical framework of Ecofeminism. By portraying female characters who connect in multiple ways with nature and also those who do not at all create a bond with nature, these authors have dismantled the cultural dualism that sees a connection between women and nature in linear ways. The women authors question the cultural representation of nature as feminine, by problematising the conceived bond between women and nature. Cultural, social, material and spiritual-these are the terms that define these connections that are anything but simple and linear. On the other hand, the female authors also make us rethink the role of modernity and its implications.

These women authors possess a certain eco-consciousness and are able to explore the many shades of nature-women bond. Indian women writers both in theory and literature of post-independence era have been dealing with the connection that women share with nature. These writers are looking at things a bit differently. They have been able to reflect on a definite eco-consciousness in their works. This consciousness sees human lives as a part of a larger nature and realizes that when this nature is exploited human lives are affected. These writers have gone against the norm; when growing industrialisation is looked upon as an optimistic change in the lives of poor Indians these writers show the adverse effects of

[139] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 186.

industrialisation, development projects of free India. The writings of the women authors are unique in a sense that they end up questioning many parameters of mainstream ecofeminist theory, such as:

1. The unquestioning acceptance of women and nature connection.
2. Acceptance of third world women as inherently eco-conscious.
3. Modernisation is a threat to nature in the West whereas the East remains unaffected.

The women authors show that not all women connect to nature impulsively. They have pointed out that even the women who belong to cultures that see nature as divine can be fooled into believing that nature can be seen as a resource. The writers have also shown us that the East has accepted the Western model of development as the best model to follow. Thus modernisation that has become a threat to nature in the West has also become a major threat to ecological harmony in the Eastern countries as well. The aim is to find out the ways in which the works of these Indian women writers can be in some ways categorized as ecofeminist as the theory dictates and at the same time deviate from many aspects of Ecofeminism.

CHAPTER THREE

Ecofeminism and Modernity

"Human colonizing and conquering others have a propensity for this, for burning behind them what they cannot possess or control, as if their conflicts are not with themselves and their own way of being, but with the land itself."[140]

Introduction:

The European Enlightenment movement gave birth to the notion of modernity and, with it, the notion of progress. Existing binaries have been dichotomized and positioned one against the other in a hierarchical manner in the name of unification, universality, and support for science and technology. As a result, we frequently perceive one as being superior to the other, flourishing, and growing. Mies writes in *Ecofeminism* (2010): "Nature is subordinated to man; woman to man; consumption to production; and the local to the global, and so on."[141] David Pepper thinks that this idea hasn't been around for very long. In the book *Modern Environmentalism: An Introduction*, David Pepper says that this idea of "self" and "other" comes from the West and the "scientific revolution" of the 16th to 18th centuries, which happened at the same time as the start of industrial capitalism. This time period, from the Renaissance in the 14th to 16th century to the Enlightenment in the 18th century, set the stage for the "modern" times in the 18th to 20th centuries.[142]

Ecofeminists hold the belief that the scientific revolution and the new sciences have not been able to demonstrate that they are beneficial for all humanity, despite the fact that

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[140] Linda Hogan, *Getting over the Color Green: Contemporary Environmental Literature of the Southwest* (Tucson, USA: University of Arizona Press, 2001). 311

[141] Maria Mies and Vandana Shive, *Ecofeminism* (New Delhi: Rawat Publication, 2010), 5.

[142] David Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge Publication, 1996), 124.

they claim to have philosophies of universal well-being and unity. It has resulted in the globe becoming more divided, with each side viewing the other as subpar and as a resource. Their answer is not to view women as being superior to males or nature as being superior to society. The solution rests in achieving a harmony and a balance between the two, which is something that can only be achieved inside a different system, a whole new world order, which ecofeminists all around the world have come to a consensus on. They hold this belief because they are aware that the current order of the world will always view the 'other' not only as distinct from itself but also as an adversary. The concept of natural selection, also known as the struggle for existence (Darwinism), and self-interest as the foundation of economic processes all have a tendency to project one as being superior to other. This dominating 'one,' the 'I,' is then always at war, engaged in a struggle against nature, the other gender, and other marginal entities that exist in a social system. The battle that these marginal entities face is, in actuality, much more difficult. The locals, people and ecology are most adversely affected by such conflicts of interest, continual dominance over, and exploitation of the margins.[143] The fate of these peripheral entities stays the same, regardless of how much we discuss development and the global economy. Because the globe still promotes the interests of the privileged few, the vision of a new world that works for the advancement of everyone remains impossible.

The locals, the natives, and the underprivileged do not in any manner reap the benefits of modernity. In order to explain how the dominant power politics foster environments of inequality, disparity, and injustice, the inquiry and elucidation of the broken promise of modernity become crucial. That's exactly what the female authors do. They are focusing the scope of a novel on the continuous struggles of all marginalised groups, which justifies how

[143] *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism*, ed. Greta Gaard, Simon C. Estok and Serpil Opperman (New York: Routledge, 2017).

they portray the characters' fights for justice and equality. The victory of modernity inevitably involves the destruction of nature as well as of human and non-human life that are connected to and dependent upon nature. Women writers argue how modernity promotes erroneous notions of development in their efforts to expose the realities of modernity. They demonstrate how lives are lost and crushed by modernization. They consider the connections that exist between women and nature and how intricate those connections are. Finally, in their criticism of modernity, they have successfully explored various aspects of Ecofeminism and help in broadening the peripheries of the theory itself.

Industry, Modernity and Development:

Technology and power over nature have a direct link between them. Science, on the other hand, does not share a direct link with the domination of nature. It is technology that uses science to conquer nature. Technology is man's weapon of control. Human greed and the use of technology can be said to have a direct relationship. William Leiss in his essay "The Domination of Nature" refuses to connect scientific rationality with technological rationality.[144] The reason he sets for this is twofold. Firstly, dominance over nature is achieved through technological development. And it is the way; he believes leads to the power over man as well. Secondly, technological rationality causes social conflict as it is linked with the creation of weapons of mass destruction, control of human behaviour and so forth.[145] The female authors often argue that scientific knowledge can be applied to enhance human welfare. The tension and struggle are brought about by the employment of technology. Indian woman activist Vandana Shiva disagrees with Leiss's view that science is not to be blamed for the chaos that modernity causes. She challenges the whole idea of

[144] William Leiss, "The Domination of Nature," in *Ecology*, ed. Carolyn Merchant (New York: Humanity Books, 2008), 3.

[145] Leiss, "The Domination of Nature," 6.

knowledge, which she believes is fundamentally Western, in her book *Ecofeminism* (2010)[146]. Man is portrayed as the most advanced, cleverest, and thus superior among all other species within this knowledge system. Therefore, man's victory over all inferior beings, including nature, becomes essential, and his exploitation is justified. Scientific knowledge has no bounds and is constantly coming up with new methods to alter nature and permanently harm it. Natural resources are destroyed as a result of the total lack of ethics ingrained in this body of knowledge. Science views nature as an observer that can be studied. By labelling them as unscientific and so unreliable, this technique of scientific inquiry decreases the capacity to know through other forms of knowledge. Additionally, it diminishes nature's status from a living entity to that of an inert substance. Shiva labels it 'reductionist' because of this. In comparison to scientific information, other forms of knowledge that have been labelled as false or unscientific are likewise devalued. The wisdom of women is despised and ignored. Traditional knowledge systems that do not threaten nature are devalued by modern scientific knowledge systems.[147] The protection of nature and all sentient beings within it is advocated by such peripheral knowledge systems. Shiva writes: "The devaluation of contribution from women and nature goes hand in hand with the value assigned to acts of colonisation as acts of development and improvement."[148]

The relationship between technology and environmental degradation is further explained by David Pepper in his book *Modern Environmentalism: An Introduction*[149] (1996). He observes that it is human tendency to come to the false conclusion that if something is proved to be good, getting more of it becomes necessary for him. Thus

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[146] Maria Mies and Vandana Shive, *Ecofeminism* (New Delhi: Rawat Publication, 2010).

[147] Giovanna Di Chiro, **"**Indigenous Peoples and Biocolonialism: Defining the "Science of Environmental Justice" in the Century of the Gene," in *Environmental Justice and Environmentalism*, ed. Ronald Sandler and Phaedra C. Pezzullo, (Cambridge, Massachusett: The MIT Press, 2007), 270.

[148] Mies and Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, 25.

[149] David Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

technological benefits once enjoyed by man become essential for him to survive. Hence more technological and economic growths are advocated to cure the social ills that we face. Even environmental issues are also addressed and attempted to solve from technological angles. Progress is now synonymous with technological advancements and global economic growth. The more intricate, complex and devastating a technology is the more it is perceived as advanced.[150] It is against such views that environmentalists stand against. In such aspects, environmentalists and ecofeminists are similar to each other. Both stand against conventional value systems that separate humans from nature and look upon nature as an object that can be exploited for human benefit. Environmentalists see human beings as a part of nature and advocate the protection of nature regardless of its so called and popularly perceived value to us. The human society that both environmentalists and ecofeminists envision is a society that is fundamentally cooperative; a society that values spiritual growth rather than material advancement. In the place of scientific knowledge, they stress upon the valid ways of acquiring knowledge. Both see nature as an organic whole whereas science splits nature into separate categories so that it can be analysed, dissected and then exploited by humans.

Following independence, a nation like India adopted a West-inspired development strategy. We must keep in mind that such a development model is largely based on contemporary scientific knowledge, which presents itself as universal and advantageous for everyone. Furthermore, it rejects the legitimacy of indigenous knowledge and the historical knowledge of Third World cultures. For certain power hungry nations and individuals, this development paradigm did indeed work successfully. When such models are put into practice in a country like India, tragedy always follows. When India was eventually set free from British domination after years of incarceration, the main goal was to transform it into a modern nation. A period of transition had come. Indian policymakers also recognised the

[150] David Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 125.

necessity to transform an agrarian nation like India in order to cope with the world that was rushing toward modernization. Establishing industries in the villages was the first step. Many believed it would eradicate the poverty, would benefit them in many ways. But many were sceptical about it. They could see the consequences because they were giving up a lot in the pursuit of a brighter future. They lost their traditional skills for surviving, farming, and relying on woods, as well as their territories and identities. The worst sufferers were the women and the children. Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (2007) is a story of a remarkable woman named Rukmani. Through her eyes, we get to see that time in the history of India when modernity was quietly encroaching in a village, altering the lives of many, disrupting the natural processes on which life depends and thrives. We see how a happy household turns into a graveyard; how land bound people leave their beloved piece of land and come to a hostile city.

Modernity and the Indian Village in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (2007):

Rukmani and Nathan's lives are initially happy. Everyone's existence is made more enjoyable by the continual flow of life's inherent rhythm. Rukmani is content in Nathan's house. She says: "While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eyes, and your husband sees beauty in you which no one has seen before, and you have a good store of grain laid away for hard times, a roof over you and a sweet stirring in your body, what more can a woman ask for? My heart sang and my feet were light as I went about my work, getting up at sunrise and going to sleep content. Peace and quiet were ours."[151] The link between Rukmani and her happy life in nature is quite obvious. Later chapters, when we watch her tending to her garden, reveal the depth of that attachment. She has access to an abundance of fruits and vegetables thanks to the garden. They are not materially wealthy, but they are safe

[151] Kamala Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve* (Navi Mumbai: Penguin Random House, 2007), 9.

and secure because they know how to farm, grow their own food, and survive as best they could in the natural world. Additionally, they have their own supply of food that they have produced themselves for emergency situations. They have a pleasant life thanks to a self-sustaining system based on harmony and balance. Out of this abundance, a small-scale economy emerges that includes women's labour, which is frequently overlooked in mainstream economic activities. Now that Rukmani can sell the produce from her garden, she can purchase additional necessities for her kids, such as milk and clothing. Her kids are healthy and content.

In contrast to Rukmani's vibrant and diverse garden, we learn about the Tea Plantation Programme later on in the story, where her boys are employed to provide for the family. The two distinct forms of agriculture are founded on two different models. One is that of Rukmani's garden; it is diverse, organic, and provides for her financially, and thereby empowers her. She is able to supply additional necessities for her children. The tea plantations can be thought of as cash-cropping or profit-making plantations. A few wealthy men benefit from bigger economic processes that are aided by large-scale agriculture that produces only one type of crop. Thus, cash crop production is driven by market demand and is not reliant on the soil's characteristics. There lies no direct link between the farmers who work in the field and the production and profits of the production. It also destroys the fertility of the soil as fertility depends on the diversity of crop production. Vandana Shiva writes: "Crop uniformity, however, undermines the diversity of biological systems which form the production system as well as the livelihoods of people where work is associated with diverse and multiple use systems of forestry, agriculture and animal husbandry." [152] The dominant agricultural paradigm supports monoculture in food production and neglects diversity promoted by women, on the false assumption that monocultures produce more. This modern

[152] Mies and Shiva, *Ecofeminism* , 165.

idea centred on agriculture and is controlled by men has been contested by many activist groups. Navdanya, Shiva's seed-saving organisation, has published their findings which indicate that women-operated farms, produce more quality food, more nutritious food rather than the industrial chemical farms. There is a growing belief amongst us that the world cannot be fed with organic farms and they need genetic engineering in farming. But the truth is as supported by Shiva that small ecological farms have productivity that is a hundred times more in quantity than industrial farm.[153]

Before modernity arrived, India's economy and way of life were reliant on diverse and organic agriculture. However, for those who picture an India that might be classified as developing, it is not an apt representation of a modern India. Industry consequently enters the peaceful village. Everything for the villagers changes when a tannery facility is established. Despite the fact that the story is set shortly after independence, it is clear that white people continue to run the operations of this new development project. They take ownership of the work site with their innate superiority and tell the locals to leave since they are disturbing the workers. A couple of Rukmani's lines from this section give an idea of how the change is starting to take place and how she perceives the abnormality of the entire situation: "In our maidan, in our village he stood, telling us to go."[154]

Rukmani can recognise the risks even though they compensate their employees well. She also is relieved when they start to leave for a little while. Nathan, however, is unable to comprehend Rukmani's emotions or perspective. Like other villagers, Nathan believes that industry may benefit them by offering employment possibilities and a market for the peasants to sell their harvest to people from the city. Nathan has a lack of understanding regarding the interconnectedness of the local economic system and its impact on personal circumstances,

[153] Mies and Shiva, *Ecofeminism* , 165.

[154] Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, 29.

specifically the increased cost of commodities. Malnutrition in children would result from the disruption in the local economic system. Mindless implementation of development projects in the village results in devastating consequences and the worst sufferers are the women and the children. Shiva calls it "mal-development". Rukmani doesn't want the foreign intruders in her village anymore but Nathan wants them to return. Rukmani's reaction to this is significant. She says: "'Never, never',I cried. 'They may live in our midst but I can never accept them, for they lay their hands upon us and we are all turned from tilling to barter, and hoard our silver since we cannot spend it, and see our children go without the food that their children gorge, and it is only in the hope that one day things will be as they were that we have done these things. Now that they have gone let us forget them and return to our ways.'"[155]

Her worst nightmare comes true in a relatively short time. We observe her nursing her younger kid, who is now three years old. He is the youngest child in the family. She responds to the white man Kenny who enquires about her feeding a three year old. She says: "'we had to sell our goats,' I said. 'I can no longer afford to buy milk, but while my son is young and needs it I will give it to him.'"[156] They have lost their food supply, their sense of safety, and the ability to protect their children's health as a result of the development project. It is a daily effort for Rukmani to ensure that her children are well-fed and healthy. However, the battle is becoming increasingly difficult since the local economic systems are breaking down as a direct result of the interference from outsiders. Rukmani is unable to sell the produce from her garden at the market and so cannot provide the essentials for her children. Now that the entire system of the market has shifted, the less fortunate are being forced to take factory jobs.

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[155] Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, 30.

[156] Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, 35.

The deluge is another reason that has a role in the villagers' decision to seek employment at the factory. This natural disaster hits at a time when the village has already begun to take on the characteristics of a small industrial town. When there has been a crisis like this before, the ability of the villagers to survive has depended on the stored crops that they have stored. However, due to recent shifts in business practices in the marketplace, it has become increasingly difficult for the villages to save food for times of emergency. The lines spoken by Rukmani at the opening of the chapter demonstrate how knowledgeable she is on how nature works. Rukmani could see, behind the flood, the workings of greedy human beings who exploit nature for their own self-serving objectives. She says: "Nature is like a wild animal that you have trained to work for you. So long as you are vigilant and walk warily with thought and care, so long will it give you its aid; but look away for an instant, be heedless or forgetful, and it has you by the throat."[157]

Rukmani and Nathan endure a great deal of struggle, including restless nights, before they can eventually support themselves. This happens because Rukmani only keeps a tiny percentage of the food they produce. Now, working in a factory is the only option for survival. The boys of Kunthi join the tannery first, followed by the sons of Rukmani. Rukmani is still not persuaded that the factory will benefit the people, though. Rukmani still sees numerous reasons to view the factory as a scourge rather than a blessing, despite the fact that it provides the villagers with a source of money. She notices that noise is a constant problem in the village, making life there unpleasant. She witnesses obnoxious young males making remarks and gestures toward girls and ladies while loitering in the streets. Rukmani, a mother of young girls, is aware of the risk. She observes that large shop owners are gaining ground on small shop owners. Rukmani sees the factory as a monster that devours everything in its path:

[157] Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, 41.

> It was a great sprawling growth, this tannery. It grew and flourished and spread. Not a month went by but somebody's land was swallowed up, another building appeared. Night and day the tanning went on. A never ending line of carts brought the raw material in thousands of skins, goat, calf, lizard and snake skins-and took them away again tanned, dyed and finished. It seemed impossible that markets could be found for such quantities- or that so many animals existed- but so it was, incredibly.[158]

This factory after all engulfs everything in its way.

This insight by Rukmani is important in order to comprehend many aspects of capitalism and its negative impacts on both human and non-human nature. It is true that markets expand as a result of capitalism and those markets are supported by supply and demand. Rukmani is correct when she poses a seemingly straightforward statement that the markets are not enough for such quantities of stuffs made in the factory. The answer to Rukmani's observation can be found in market strategies that centre on the relationship between inflated desires and an abundance of supply. Rukmani also subtly raises the subject of animal cruelty to meet the fictitious wants that capitalism generates. To get access to a market that is always increasing, a false demand is generated. This always encourages people to further deplete the environment's resources. David Pepper writes: "The search to expand markets and command resources and cheap labour has extended the industrial-consumer society across the globe, destroying rainforests and changing climate. The overpopulated Third World is polluted and materially and culturally impoverished by this international trade system, which most people still see as essential to development."[159]

In their 1995 book *Ecology and Equity*[160], Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha criticise government development strategies that have harmed marginal communities' quality of life by overusing natural resources. Gadgil and Guha accuse the leather industry for

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[158] Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, 49.

[159] David Pepper. *Modern Environmentalism: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 14.

[160] Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *Ecology and Equity-The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

harming human and non-human nature. Gadgil and Guha consider the leather industry to be a government-beneficial establishment. The export of leather items now accounts for a sizeable portion of the national economy. However, pollution is a significant issue associated with leather production. Rukmani repeatedly directs our attention to the increasing pollution levels in the book along with the land's increasing aridity, declining fertility, and declining bird population. There are no investments made to solve the issue. As a result, the poor are forced to shoulder the full burden of the losses; initially, these lands are taken in order to develop the business, and later, the ecosystem is also harmed. The owners or the government is the sole group to profit from the tannery industry. By selling the products in the cities allows the market economy to grow. This chain of exploitation—from animals to people to nature—is created by the tannery industry. The advantages are obtained at the expense of the deterioration of India's water bodies, grasslands, and forests.

At first glance, it would appear that the peasants' ordeal is finally coming to an end. The circumstances improve for the better in Rukmani's household, albeit only for a limited amount of time. Rukmani is able to restore her composure. They get an immediate boost from industry, but it does not provide them with a sense of fulfilment in the long run. When Kunthi sells herself into prostitution so that she can provide for her family we witness how nature and human existence are beginning to disintegrate. Within a matter of days, the issue makes its way into the home of Rukmani. Everyone is caught up in the never-ending cycle of money problems. The first manufacturing workers walk out in protest. Both Arjun and Thambi decide to cease attending to their jobs. Their demand, which is quite reasonable, is for higher pay for their work. However, the proprietors of the company refuse to pay them any further compensation for their job. Because they are leaving to go to work, many people decide to join them. The situation, which appears to be stable, starts to deteriorate. The peaceful and uncomplicated way of life in the hamlet has been disrupted as a result of the so called

progress. The advancement and growth that Kunthi and Kali have been so proud of have turned out to be a trap that oppresses the villagers and exploits them for the benefit of the owners' interests. Those who exercise a modicum of common sense and insist on being paid what they are owed are fired and made destitute. The predicament deteriorates further.

It is true that the factory offers a second chance for many people, particularly after the flood when they are in a dire situation regarding their access to food, shelter, and other necessities. Working in the industry results in a steady income, and a decent wage is necessary for maintaining life. However, as a result of this transformation, a vicious cycle has been established in which one inevitably is entangled and there is no way out. Due to this reason, when Rukmani's sons stop working in the factory, they are unable to immediately resume work in the field. The next generation lacks the experience necessary to operate in the field because they have never engaged in farming or harvesting. Consequently, they do not have this knowledge. As a result, they decide to find work in Ceylon, where low-cost labour is required for tea plantations. This is yet another mistake. To begin, that method of farming is known as cash cropping, which is focused on making a profit through production and is to the benefit of the wealthy owners rather than the farmers. Second, if they leave their nation, they will never be able to return because doing so would take a significant amount of money that they will never be able to earn by working on the plantation. Therefore, it is easy to see the big picture. There is no way to revert back to the fundamentals of life once one has become mired in the complex web of the so called modern advancement. Rukmani understands that. She says: "'If you go you will never come back' I cried. 'The journey costs hundreds of rupees, you will never have much. 'They spoke soothingly- how much they would earn, and how one day they would return- as one does to a child; and I listened to them; and it was all sham, a poor shabby pretence to mask our tortured feelings.'"[161] This is

[161] Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, 70.

the first instance in the book in which a character moves to a new location in order to find work and ensure his future survival; it is the first instance of displacement. People who are unable to break free from the loop that modernity creates will inevitably end up in this position.

Not only do human lives undergo transformation and modification the natural world also starts to undergo change. Rukmani is acutely aware of the transformations taking place in the natural environment, which she is an integral part of. She states: "At one time there had been kingfishers here, flashing between the young shoots for our fish; and paddy birds; and sometimes, in the shallower reaches of the river, flamingos, striding with ungainly precision among the water reeds, with plumage of a glory not of this earth. Now birds come no more, for the tannery lay close- except crows and kites and such scavenging birds."[162] The growing industry has not only sucked lives out of the poor villagers it has turned the land barren of others: birds and animals. The presence of only crows and scavenging birds is suggestive of the effects of the tannery in the village. These birds live on the lives of dead animals just the way the tannery uses dead animals as its raw material. The land itself has lost its vigour, its ability to sustain various forms of lives. Modernity unveils itself as life sucking monster that leaves human lives and non-human nature in ruins.

The land is the only remaining opportunity for them. As long as they still have the land, there is still a chance that they will have a better life. Both Rukmani and Nathan do not have any property to call their own. They have got it from the Jaminder who owns it. After enduring a great deal of anguish, they are finally successful in maintaining their control over the piece of land, despite the fact that Jaminder wants to take it away from them because they have failed to pay their debts to him during the drought. The land is their only hope and

[162] Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, 71.

because of the land, they could dream of a better tomorrow. On the other hand, the Jaminder sells the land to the owners of the factory at a price that is more than what he is getting from Nathan. They have absolutely nothing left at this point. They have no choice but to give up their land and relocate to the city. Those whose lives are deeply attached to their land, however, may find it difficult to uproot themselves and move elsewhere. After enduring so much pain, including the death of her sons and months of famine, this is the worst that can happen to her. The fact that the factory needs her land, which is rich for cultivating rice, has left her completely perplexed. What exactly would the owners of the factory do with it? The response that Nathan gives is straightforward, but it demonstrates how development may change once-fertile terrain into a desolate wasteland: "Who knows. Perhaps they can drain it, tighten the soil; they have resources beyond our imaginings."[163] Capitalism enters the village, changes lives, profits are made and no one bothers to know what happens to the people of the land. Rukmani's words are significant here.

> Since then it had spread like weeds in an untended garden, strangling whatever life grew in its way. It had changed the face of our village beyond recognition and altered the lives of its inhabitants in a myriad way. Some- a few- had been raised up; many others cast down, lost in its clutches. And because it grew and flourished it got the power that money brings, so that to attempt to withstand it was like trying to stop the outward rush of the great juggernaut. Well, I suppose there were some families who saw in it hope for their sons: indeed, many still depend on such earnings, and if my son had still been there my thoughts might have been different; but for us as we were now, and others like us, there could be only resignation and resentment.[164]

Rukmani's words are indeed significant here.

In a sense, Rukmani is able to summarise what exactly occurs to her as well as to the hamlet immediately after modernism is introduced. She is well aware of the fact that the factory improves the quality of life for a great number of people. However, in the instance of Rukmani, it causes everything to be ruined. The factory takes both of her sons away from her.

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[163] Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, 135.

[164] Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, 136.

One of them gets out of the country, while the other is brutally put to death within the factory premises. It would have been different for her if they were still alive at the time. Many people end up in the same position as Rukmani because they are unable to keep up with the rapid development that has swept across the region. Many people are able to secure employment, but they fail to recognise, or recognise too late, that modernity fosters a fictitious concept of contentment and stability. Along with jobs, they are given pitiful pay, which are not sufficient to provide a way of life that is both enjoyable and healthy for the villages. The techniques used in the local market are altered, the prices are driven up, and the villagers continue to be impoverished and malnourished. In the specific instance of Rukmani, we observe how modernity irreparably harms her life. Although the draught ultimately proved to be catastrophic, they might have been spared if they had been able to hang onto the portion of their harvests they had set aside. But because the prices on the local market are too exorbitant, they must sell them. Finally, the land is also sold. Rukmani is aware of the vicious cycle that modernity has generated. The final terrible blow they suffer is losing the land: "While there was land, there was hope."[165]

Modernity and the Marginal Community in Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* (2008):

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, the industry to a large extent is the source of their miseries. But in the beginning, many thought that the tannery would help them financially. They couldn't fathom the effects of the tannery could have on their lives. The same thing happens when we see a dam is being constructed in a hilly Indian village in Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* (2008). This dam in the process of being built destroys nature to a great extent. But for the time being it is the immediate benefits that are being valued. The dam would be beneficial in a land where drought and flood both are realities. The villagers think that the dam would help

[165] Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, 137.

them survive the wrath of nature. But the makers of the dam do not have the best of intentions at their heart. Clinton, the chief, remains disinterested to know what good or bad effects the dam is going to have over the land. All he is concerned with is that the construction would take place at any cost. It is the exhibition of power that he does, a power given to him by science and technology: "Clinton listened with a vast boredom. It did not really interest him, this dreary saga of a hapless peasantry. He sipped his whisky and felt hot, despite the Bharat Hotel's air conditioning, and wished there were some way of dodging these emotional preliminaries. Then it was over."[166] This is what is wrong with the idea of modernity. It promises a better future but fails. It also lacks the right intention of benefitting the poor. Be it the white colonisers who implement the 'progress' ideals and popularise the propaganda or their followers who believe in them are indifferent toward the ground realities.

The first significant attack is directed towards nature. A dam is being built over a river. The mechanisms regulate the river's unrestricted, organic flow. The white masters make an effort to dominate and control it. For the native people, however, the river is a sacred, a source of life, and a vital component of maintaining life in this part of the world. Markandaya writes: "At night when the men were silent one heard the river. Like a heartbeat: insistent, unceasing, soft when you took no notice, loud when you listened."[167] The line makes a strong argument for the river's necessity. It provides the essentials for survival by coursing through the soil like blood does through the body. The machinery that is operated by men momentarily quiets the sound of the river. The two modernity's representatives, men and machines, are working to take full control of the powerful river. However, at night when all labour has stopped, the river is audible; the piercing sound serves as a reminder of its presence. Only Bashiam, the tribesman and a labour at the dam site, has the capacity to listen

[166] Kamala Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams* (Navi Mumbai: Penguin Random House, 2008), 3.

[167] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 26.

to it intently. The river, however, is the very source of life and the riches of the land. The sound of the water calms him. He falls into a deep, dreamless sleep as a result of the river's constant, rhythmic flow. However, the white maters cannot stand the river's roar since it is too loud for them to tolerate. They shut their windows, doors, and even their ears with earplugs. The nicest sound they dream of is the traffic that passes by their front doors in England since they are unaccustomed to hear the sounds of nature.[168] These white masters no longer feel a connection to nature; they become uneasy when they hear the noises of the river at night. They have arrived to divide nature and the human self. And in their attempts to prove that man is superior to nature, they have managed to master it, govern it, and use it as a resource.

The all-pervasive presence of the river has an influence not only on the people whose lives are inextricably related to the river, but also on the white masters, who find it difficult to escape the effects of the river's presence. Even Clinton has his eyes set on the river. Because he is considering constructing the dam, he is able to divert his attention away from its powerful presence for the time being, but the river will eventually catch up with him. In the morning, when he is exposed to the sun, he once more experiences a sense of strength, and the river seems to him like a bird contained in a cage that is unarmed and under control. But this is an illusion, one that he has created for himself because he thinks he is better, that the European idea of modernity is the right one to follow, and that the rest of the world, is in fact, barbaric and needs to be civilised. This thinking has led him to create this delusion. However, lurking beneath the seeming mastery that Clinton possesses lies a fear of the wrath of the mighty river that has the ability to destroy any man-made construction. That is why the river keeps coming up in his dream at night. By hoisting a flag that represents white supremacy over the work site they begin to cage the mighty river. The first thing that we observe is how

[168] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 28.

the masters are addressing the raging river. They call it a 'bastard', 'a devil'. We start to comprehend how these folks see the river, which is very different from how the inhabitants of the area see it. For the native people, the river is a deity whom they worship as the origin of all life. However, the river is only another obstacle that must be conquered for the people from the West. Their vanity prevents them from seeing that their efforts are ineffective in the face of nature's wrath. Soon, we will witness the process of creating highways by blasting through hills. Modernity intervenes by violating nature and destroying the balance of the natural world. Markandaya gives a precise description of how the act was carried out. She writes:

> The first explosion came with a great roar, singly, followed by the others in twos and threes, impacted blasts that rocked the ground on which they stood. Automatically, as one might a striking clock, Mackendrick began to count.
> Eleven...fourteen...sixteen...twenty. Twenty explosions, close on twenty-five tons of dynamite splitting open the valley in symmetrical calculated pattern. As the dust clouds rose Clinton looked down at his watch. It was exactly noon.[169]

The brutal destruction of the natural world is done with ease by the white people. For them, nature is a lifeless commodity. When compared to the men in the tribal community, there is a striking difference. They could never imagine murdering people or defacing the hills the way the white people did. They revere nature because they see it as a divine, a living entity.

The manner in which Clinton has dealt with his labours reflects the mentality of a dominant authority in the same way. The authorities have given a categorical nod in response to the demand for a pay that is fair. Clinton seems unaffected even after the other officers remind him of the potential consequences of a worker strike. He is well aware that he is holding a covert weapon in his hand. The impoverishment of the local populace serves as a weapon. The agitation among workers is a problem for which Clinton already has a solution. He makes the decision to hire a whole new and distinct group of people to take the place of

[169] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 50.

his previous workforce. He believes that the prospect of losing their jobs and having to fend for themselves would prevent them from voicing their displeasure with the white masters. It should be obvious that this is a ruse, a deception that the capitalists use to influence the labour groups, namely the tribal labour community. The factory is a place where tribal labourers are exploited because they are forced to work in exchange for a wage that is well below the average for the industry. On the other hand, if they defy their masters and refuse to do as they are told they will be thrown out and made to work for nothing. They are being dispossessed of their lands, which mean they can no longer rely on the natural environment around them for sustenance. The people are going to suffer in either case. This proves the ecofeminist presumption that 'progress' that is exploitative of both nature and people will never bring about meaningful improvement in the lives of ordinary people.[170] It merely serves to further entrench the subservience of those with less power to those with more authority. Clinton's insensitivity towards his own labour force is reemphasised when he says: "When we leave there are going to be hundreds of labour out of a job. Are we going to pension them all?"[171]

The project creates opportunities for a large number of people. One of them is Bashiam, and the new developments give him reason to be hopeful as it momentarily relieves him of his financial crunch. However, there is still the question of whether or not these initiatives for economic growth can truly protect the lives of the underprivileged. Doesn't it solely benefit the company's owners, the select few who hold the most power within the company? Isn't the overarching goal of the capitalist system is to maximise profits for an elite group of individuals at the expense of nature and the vast majority of people all over the world? We come to see that it is beneficial for a certain group of people who control the

[170] Carolyn Merchant, "The Scientific Revolution and The Death of Nature", *Isis* 97, no. 3 (September, 2006): 519, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/508090

[171] Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, 101.

global economy and the markets. When wealthy people provide opportunities for low-income people to earn money, the recipients regard this as a sign of hope. However, the issue is that they are dependent on the capitalist system, which simply requires low-wage labour to function. As soon as the work is finished, the labourers are left in a state of ambiguity regarding their subsequent lives. They are no longer able to rely on their own methods of subsistence because they are dependent on factory labour. This makes the future look dismal for them. Because of this, the people are the ones who suffer the most as a result of so-called progress and modernization.

The natural world is being exploited to such an excessive degree that it has been left nearly lifeless, wrecked, and desolate. And the destruction of nature has an immediate and direct impact on the lives of people who are dependent on the natural world. Another peaceful hill community has been obliterated by the onslaught of construction, as can be seen here. Markandaya writes:

> The river glittered, reflecting the agglomeration of lights in the valley except where the cliffs closed in over cascading waters in the narrow gorge. In the shattered plateau, dwarfed by the debris left from blasting, men were at work; blue flame leapt and spurted from the machines they wielded, the electric shovels and diggers that bit into and gouged out rock.
>
> The silence that came once in the twenty-four hour cycle, enfolding the hills and valleys at nightfall, was now permanently fractured. At dawn, at noon, by night, machines thundered and pounded; land and air vibrated spasmodically to the dull crump of explosions, the shock waves travelling to the barracks, the bungalows, the leisure blocks and the tribal settlements.[172]

It is abundantly clear that the process of building the dam has harmed nature and disrupted the lives of the people, and as a result, the people's lives have been severely impacted. The marginal population is almost often the most severely damaged. The indigenous people in this area are the ones who have been hit the hardest by the onslaught of modern civilization. First, the process of modernization drives the indigenous populations off their lands, and then

[172] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 105.

they are relocated to the valleys further downstream. And secondly, it results in the production of toxic waste, which in turn pollutes the rivers. The unfortunate tribal community is powerless to stop the onslaught of development that swept across their grounds, their dwellings, and all aspects of the natural world that provided them with sustenance. Helen has the desire for these individuals to relocate once more to a more secure location so that they can at the very least avoid the negative impacts of the development project. But Helen is unable of comprehending the fact that there is no way out for these folks. The tribal chief explains:

> There were no reasonable moves left to them. Depending on water, they were tied to the river. But downstream the ramifications of building requisitioned the river banks until the terrain grew untenable. Upstream beyond the sheltering hill, they and their huts would be in the path of the south-west monsoon winds. Those fragile huts, that would take off like kites at very first puff. Backs against a mountain she thought, they had been pushed as far as they could go. Physically speaking no further retreat was left. So they stayed where they were, while the bed of the valley quaked, and dust flew through the thatch on their ramshackle huts and settled grittily in every nook and cranny.[173]

While the tribal chief demonstrates sympathy for his people, Clinton, the character who represents modernity, has an utter lack of interest in the impact of the disruptions in the lives of the tribal people. Helen's unending preoccupation with the welfare of the neighbourhood residents keeps her constantly occupied. She is aware of the gravity of the situation, and despite this, she does not intend to turn her back on them as her husband Clinton and the majority of other members of the white community have done. Helen is profoundly distressed by his disinterest in the entire affair of things: "'It's a bit hard on them', said Helen, glancing at the solid walls of their carefully sited bungalow, the double insulating glass, the excluding

[173] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 107.

mesh at the windows. 'They're rattled around like peas in tin.' 'They have been rattled around a considerable time.' Said Clinton. 'They should be used to it now.'"[174]

Despite the fact that she is aware that it is impossible to turn the wheels of modernity backward and that the situation for the people would only become worse, she harbours the hope that Clinton will say a few words of sympathy. The only thing that can preserve their relationship is his compassion, but unfortunately it doesn't work out that way. Helen's involvement in such seemingly insignificant issues continues to leave Clinton speechless and shocked. The pride that Clinton carries as a member of the white racial majority is exposed by the comments of Helen: "Can't you care? Don't human beings matter anything to you? Do they have to be a special kind of flesh before they do?"[175]

The white masters were unaware of the effects of the dam over the river because of their lack of curiosity and enormous pride in their own intelligence and race. The river is rising despite being caged in concrete. The slow-moving river that is responsible for the conception of life and the provision of support in a variety of forms is currently being turned into a slave by the white masters. But the question that needs to be answered is what will happen if even the smallest aspect in the carefully laid out plan goes wrong. The consequences can have devastating effects. When Lefevre looks out upon the surging river, he is filled with a sense of dread. Even though he has measured the river and used every available contemporary technology in an attempt to comprehend its make-up, he still feels helpless in the face of the surging torrent. He is aware that there is no amount of scientific knowledge that can adequately predict what the river would do if it goes berserk: "Sometimes, watching the river lashing and writhing around their handiwork, aware of the sweep and strength of its currents, Lefevre felt a chill fear closing round his spine. Lefevre

[174] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 107.

[175] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 107.

knew to a quite precise degree, turned to it again and again for that vital underpinning to his faith when he looked at the cascading water and felt himself shiver, when the river liquefied his strength, as it could."[176]

In a terrible episode that accidentally kills predominantly white men, the fear becomes a reality. The bodies of the soldiers remain buried beneath the dam's construction, making rescue efforts difficult. In Clinton's opinion, salvaging the dead is not necessary because doing so may compromise the dam's construction. Others, however, desire to bury the dead in accordance with Christian tradition. However, no member of the white group could perform the rites due to the bodies' extreme distortion. The rituals are carried out by the native women. Helen is angered by her husband's lack of empathy in regards to the entire affair. Helen begs him to stop the work since it has turned into a death trap for both the officers and the workers. Clinton, though, is convinced and believes that the impoverished have adapted to life at the work site. This is essential since Clinton and Helen advocate different philosophies of modernity. Helen's analysis of modernity's effects offers us an understanding of the specific problems within the Western idea of modernity:

> 'Our world' said she. 'The one in which I live. Things are battened down init. Under concrete and mortar, all sorts of things. The land. Our instincts. The people who work in our factories, they've forgotten what fresh air is like. Our animals-we could learn from them, but we're Christian you know, an arrogant people, so we deprive them of their rights. Deny them. Pretend they haven't got any. Then they don't know the sunshine or rain either. Sometimes they can't move, poor things. We don't allow them to, in case they yield us one ounce less of their flesh. Where is our instinct for pity? Blunted. We've forgotten what we know. Where can we turn to, to learn? A million years accumulating, and we know no better than to kick it in the teeth. Now I can't even sense rain although it is there.'[177]

Helen's words perfectly capture what she believes to be the limitations of the current world. We can see that contemporary man has cut himself off from his roots, the elements he is

[176] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 112.

[177] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 114.

composed of, and his pure being that is a part of nature. Here, Helen comprehends the effects of transforming the human world into a modern habitat, much like Maya, Raka, Rukmani, and other female characters. Life grew simpler and quicker, but in the process of adjusting to new lifestyles, man loses something valuable: the strength of his instincts, his environmental awareness, and his understanding that his own life is a part of nature and that he must defend it. Helen is aware of it. She says: "I belong, I'am not alone. Everything is a part of me, and I'm a part of everything-not just a pop-up cardboard figure."[178]

The Coffer Dams by Markandaya introduces Helen as a woman who stands in stark contrast to the men in the story. One can identify the flaws in the Western notion of modernity through this contrast. Their conception of modernity is based mostly on taming nature. The Western mindset rejects the idea that humans are powerless against nature's wrath. With his cutting-edge tools, he believes he can control the river. However, Gopal never undervalues the strength of the great river. He approaches nature differently from the men with white skin. Lefevre is certain that they can control it and build the dam. Gopal agrees, but he is not completely convinced.

Gopal's fears soon turn into reality as another disaster strikes the dam site. This time it is the Indian workers who have lost their lives under the dam's base. Clinton's reaction in this case is most noteworthy as he completely disproves any effort to recover those bodies. However, some white officials do not demonstrate any regret for the unfortunate fate of the people who have lost their lives or those who have lost loved ones, but they do demonstrate concern for the recovery of the bodies. Clinton remains unaffected: "'There is no need,' he said 'to shift the boulder. It rests on the dam, and can be moulded in. 'the men,' said

[178] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 144.

Mackendrick sickly. 'Or the men', said Clinton, 'their bodies can be incorporated into the structure.'" [179]

There is a similarity between these two disasters. In the first one the bodies of white men were stuck and the whole community with all its efforts recovered those bodies and the most unexpected help came from the tribal population. Here in the second disaster something very similar takes place. Human lives are lost, bodies are stuck under the new construction. But the difference is that the bodies are of Indian men. In this case, the white masters show absolutely no remorse. They are not even interested in recovering the bodies. The tribal people who perceive divinity in everything in nature sees the dead bodies as sacred. It is because of this sense that they agreed to do the last rites for the white dead bodies. But now no one from the white community expresses concern towards recovering the bodies of native labourers or their last rites. This time the tribal rituals for the dead appears to them as "uncivilised"[180]

Natural disasters serve as a constant reminder that no matter how robust human-made structures are or how sophisticated the technologies, nature has the capacity to demolish them all. This force of nature is mentioned in Roy's 2009 novel *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*. We see a river that has been peacefully running past Shanti's ancestral house for a very long time. Each year, during the monsoon, its perimeter gradually grows. It begins to devour the land around its shore. We see a pregnant Shanti who is about to give birth yet the river has now drowned the floors in Shanti's house. The physicians and other helpers are unable to access the house due to the surging water. The words of Shanti have struck us strongly at this time:

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[179] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 172.

[180] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 183.

> The river will make this house its own. What are these grand houses but arrogance? My grandfather would boast of the Italian marble. That marble will be the river's bed now. Fish will swim in and out of our finest teak shelves and nibble our ivory figurines. Frogs will lay eggs in our English porcelain, water snake will twine our pillars. The windows will fall off and flow down to the sea. My grandfather's bust will stare into weeds, the ink from our papers will colour the water black, moss will ooze out of burst bedding, beds and chair will float out like boats, the rooms will lie empty for fish to breed in them.[181]

Humans are clueless to how nature functions due to their ignorance and arrogance. To demonstrate their progress, humans start to manipulate and enslave nature. However, a natural catastrophe negates its superiority.

Modernity and Nature in Anita Desai's *Fire on the mountain* (2015):

In Markandaya's novels the theme of modernisation and development has been presented. The narratives are mostly set in villages of India right after India's independence. The postmodern era is the setting for Desai's book *Fire on the Mountain* (2015). It revolves around the private life of Nanda Kaul, a wealthy woman playing the role of a powerful man's wife while suffering from emotional exhaustion. She seeks tranquility and peace in nature. However, when her great-granddaughter Raka moves in with her, her entire world is turned upside down. Desai spends the majority of the first few chapters explaining how the two female characters interact with nature. Raka is the one who makes us aware of the changes happening in the tiny mountain village. Raka finds the alarming signals of modernity—a chemical factory—first because she is more in tune with nature and spends much of her time exploring the outdoors: "Looking down the length of the jagged ledge, Raka saw it lined with other back walls and servant's quarter, tin sheds and cook houses. Around the bend, these grew in size, rose and billowed into the enormous concrete walls of what looked like a

[181] Anuradha Roy, *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (India: Picador India, 2009), 74.

factory, for sharp chimneys thrust out cushions and scarves of smokes, black on the milky blue afternoon sky."[182]

Raka is taken aback when she first sees the factory because she has never given any prior information regarding the factory. Her perception of the alpine landscape is that it is pristine, unspoiled, and a haven of tranquility. She has personal experience with the aftermath of factory life, having grown up in a contemporary nation of Europe. Raka, like other female characters in other works such as Rukmani from *Nectar in a Sieve*, Maya from *The Folded Earth*, and Helen from *The Coffer Dams*, is able to predict the repercussions that can have an impact on the lives of the people as a result of modernization. The plant creates pharmaceuticals and serums, both of which are necessary components of contemporary medical procedures. Additionally, the factory emits poisonous fumes, is responsible for the deaths of animals, and pollutes both the land and the water. People in positions of authority are the ones who are putting the contemporary project into action. They are so consumed by the desire to make money by spoiling the untouched land that they do not give a second thought to the potentially devastating effects that the factory could have on the surrounding area, on the natural world, and on the lives of people who are closely intertwined with the natural world.

Desai begins to direct our attention to the darker side of the mountain land through the eyes of Raka. Raka's concern over the recent changes in the mountain land makes her search for answers from an unlikely person Ram Lal, the cook and the keeper of the household. Ram Lal's account of the factory gives a lot of insight about what exactly is happening to the place: "That is the Pasteur Institute. It is where doctors make serum for injections.

[182] Anita Desai, *Fire on the Mountain* (Haryana: Random House India, 2015), 46.

> 'Why is there so much smoke?' She asked, in a somewhat weak voice.
>
> 'Oh, they are always boiling serum there- boiling, boiling. They make serum for the whole country... See those chutes? They empty the bones and ashes of dead animals down into the ravine. It's a bad place. Don't go there.'
>
> 'Why?' 'Jackles come at night to chew the bones. Then they go mad and bite the village dogs. The mad dogs run around, biting people. Keep away from there.'[183]

Many aspects of ecofeminist concern surface here. The factory is polluting the land, killing innocent animals and captures many for experiments. Ecofeminists for a very long time have been raising awareness about the cruelties done to animals in the name of modernity.[184]

Modernity and Poverty in Anita Desai's *The Village by the Sea* (2015):

Desai takes another swipe at modernity in her novel *The Village by the Sea* (2015). The peaceful coastal community of Thul undergoes transformation throughout the course of the story as a result of the introduction of several construction projects. It has been converted into a chemical industry. In this book, Desai explores the connection between women and nature in a variety of new and interesting ways. Desai not only focuses our attention on the practical side of the man-nature link but also brings to light the spiritual side of the relationship. On the one hand, she paints a vivid picture of the natural world around the community, but on the other, she emphasises how wretched the lives of these less fortunate people are. The sights and sounds of nature, as well as the flora and fauna of the region, all point to the abundance that the natural world offers to them. However, the majority of people still live in poverty despite the wealth that is available to them. This is due to the fact that their lives are now dominated by materialism.

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[183] Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, 49.

[184] Ronnie Zoe Hawkins, "Ecofeminism and Nonhumans: Continuity, Difference, Dualism, and Domination," *Hypatia* 13, no. 1 (Winter, 1998), 161, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810611

Desai foreshadows the impending transformations that are going to take place in the hamlet immediately after the story begins. The mills and the industries are gradually expanding their presence. The outcomes of such development programmes give the impression that they will be beneficial at first, but as time goes on, we find that they cause several problems for the people living in poor villages. The first significant shift that takes place is the dismantling of an independent support structure that has been designed to secure people's continued existence. People have now started to become dependent on the new economy under the new system, which will ultimately cause them to lose resources since those resources will be controlled by a small group of powerful people. For the majority of them, the prospect of a better living standard and a more respectable wage remains a utopian dream.

The truck, the building supplies, the pipes, and the large equipment are the first things that represent for Hari the stepping stones of modernity in the village. The significance of his talk with a young child from the community named Ramu needs to be mentioned. It is via this straightforward exchange between two people living in the hamlet that the entire scheme of development, dream, and then deceit is revealed.[185] When Hari asks Ramu who has come to make his home on the hillside, Ramu responds by saying that it would not be a home but rather a factory if it were to be built there. Hari, being a native of the village, has never seen a factory and hence is unaware of the consequences that factories can have. On the other hand, Ramu seems to have greater experience. He assures Hari that the factory will be a boon to the villagers by stating, "The Government is planning to build a wonderful factory here. A multitude of factories. They number in the hundreds. Soon they will be sending bulldozers and earthmovers and steamrollers. They are going to widen the highway- make it twice as broad. Then their machines can be brought here. Then they will build house for the workers.

[185] Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, 12.

The workmen will come. The factories will be build."[186] The plan is surely magnificent. But for Hari the only concern is the future of the hill, or the temple on the hill. His apparently simple question bears profound implications: "What will happen to the hill and the temple on top?"[187] The hill is nature and the temple is a symbol of the divine. The divine sits on nature. The local people could never think of damaging these two as their beliefs and their lives depend on them. But the promise of a better future that modernity offers is too alluring. Ramu's reply is the proof: "Make it all flat. Build the factory on top."[188]

Desai much like ecofeminist thinkers believes that an imitation of Western model of development would not solve anything. On the contrary it would destroy the harmony between man and nature. Development which is profit oriented would end up being just a source of wealth for a few. It would not benefit the poor. But people like Ramu are hopeful: "We'll get jobs Hari-we'll get jobs. You'll see."[189] We are reminded of Rukmani's story where many villagers see opportunity in the developmental project. But their hopes are shattered as soon as the monster named modernity begins to spread its wings. Hari like Rukmani is sceptical of the change. He doesn't want the village to change in anyway. He has seen his grandfather and his father working in connection to nature, earning for the family and surviving. No change is welcoming to him. But things are no longer in control. It doesn't matter now what Hari wants as the whole system has changed and for a man like Hari there is no way out than to surrender to modernity. Hari is constantly occupied with the thought of sustaining his family in his present crisis. He needs financial aid to survive and to provide for his family members. The extreme poverty along with the changes in the village forces him to take radical measures for survival.

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[186] Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, 12.

[187] Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, 12.

[188] Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, 12.

[189] Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, 13.

The snare that modernity sets for its victims has many guises. Hari is absolutely correct in his assumption that the factory owners are likely to be men from the city. They would be able to operate various pieces of machinery. This causes Hari and his friend to get into a fight with each other. A friend of Hari believes that the villagers would become proficient in operating machines. Once more, Hari is sceptical about the possibility of villagers learning how to work in factories. Hari is aware that in order for them to be able to work in a factory, they are required to have specific skill which they do not possess. This is the truth of the situation. These impoverished villagers, who have high hopes for the new factory, are ultimately let down by the promise that is made to them. It is no longer providing these men with enough to survive. When a factory is built, they are unable to even get a job, and even if they do get a job, they are unable to work in an environment that is completely different from the one they were used to:

> 'We don't know how to,' Hari said.
>
> 'As if we cant learn!'
>
> 'Anyone can learn.'
>
> 'Anyone can work machines. They will show us-
>
> Then we will do it.'
>
> 'We don't know anything about machines,' Hari protested. 'We only know how to fish and how to grow coconuts.'[190]

This unfortunate outcome of modernization in a rural community is unavoidable.

In her novel, Desai focuses on how modernization affects the lives of the underprivileged villagers. On one hand, modernity forces the poor to take part in the new economic systems and on the other, it carefully destroys the old systems that hitherto have sustained lives. The journey Hari takes from his hamlet to the city and back again illustrates

[190] Desai, *The Village by the Sea*, 20.

how modernization is transforming people's lives. But what happens to the Thul women? Ecofeminists think that when nature is destroyed in the name of civilization, women suffer the most. Lila must survive and provide for her family in the village while Hari can daydream about working in the factory and eventually finds a chance in Bombay. Desai shows us how much Lila has to struggle and give up for others when she explains the clothes she wears when she visits the market or the temple. In the novel modernity manifests itself as a facility that creates synthetic fertilisers. A manufacturing worker gives Hari this information. The man tries to persuade Hari that chemical fertiliser is more effective for the crops and would lead to massive crop production. Farmers would benefit as a result of this. But Hari is not persuaded. From an ecofeminist standpoint, the interaction with the factory worker is important. He is excited about the project, the plant, and the network of factories that will be built around Thul. But the truth about this initiative is kept strictly under wraps. This occurs in practically every development initiative that is initiated by either private businesses or the government. The factory's supporter claims the following: "Here factories will produce tons and tons of chemicals to be sent all over the country and sold to farmers, rich farmers. Chemicals for big farms, chemicals to make crops grow better than you can ever see them grow in fields like yours."[191]

On the one hand, there are tremendous opportunities for the factory to advance in the future. On the other hand, the man also draws attention to the conventional approaches to creating fertilisers and the inadequacy of these approaches in terms of the production of a significant quantity of crops. Therefore, development programmes not only result in the destruction of self-sufficient farming methods, but they also succeed in convincing people that the contemporary way of doing things is the best way. And mostly disadvantaged peasants are persuaded. But as readers, we are sceptical about the project, and as soon as we

[191] Desai, *The Village by the Sea*, 62.

hear about the chemical fertilisers, the market value of it, and the realisation that this project will benefit the owners and not the users, we are reminded of the disastrous consequences that can result from introducing foreign methods into farming. This would create another vicious cycle involving international banks, money, high amounts of profit for one side while an insurmountable loss for the other. It would ultimately claim the lives of countless people. This is a common occurrence in India, even today when countless lives of farmers are lost because they could not pay off their debts. Big farms, global banks, and multinational corporations are going to benefit by exploiting nature, manipulating impoverished farmers, and destroying healthy eco systems as well as age-old farming knowledge.[192]

From this conversation between Hari and the factory man one aspect comes forward that for a poor boy like Hari these factories are the only opportunity to earn daily wage. He begins to dream of a better life for himself and his sisters and mother. The apparent illusion of a comfortable life promised by modernity begins to engulf him. He dreams of becoming a factory worker: "Hari's head is filled with a vision of shining factories, tall chimneys, clouds of strange smelling smoke, people like ants going through the big gates- and amongst them a boy in khaki shorts and a torn shirt, himself."[193] The stranger, the factory man again appears when Hari goes up to Biju to ask for a job. There he hears the factory man who advocates the setting of a series of factories in their village. Hari also hears criticism from the man about the self sufficient systems of the village. For the residents of the village, agriculture, fishing, and plantations provide their primary means of subsistence. These processes are all reliant on nature. All of these sources of income would vanish as a result of the factory's destruction of the environment. The local fisherman Biju, who is fairly affluent, is not persuaded by the industrial worker. Biju has the erroneous idea that his boat will be able to catch a lot of fish,

[192] Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive* (New Delhi: Rawat Publication, 2010).

[193] Desai, *The Village by the Sea*, 66.

maintaining his status as a wealthy fisherman. The issue is that there aren't enough fish in the water to be caught using conventional fishing techniques because of how drastically nature is changing. The manufacturing worker makes this point. In response, Biju adamantly asserts that his community of Thul also boasts agricultural and plantation assets. But Biju fails to realise that as modernity infiltrates the community, these are also in danger. The manufacturing worker's words summarise the crisis: "'Yes, yes', said the man, spitting out bits of tobacco. I've had your rice. I've seen your fields. They will soon go. All the land will be bought up, factories will be built on it. Your rice will go."[194]

This paints an image for us, and it's not a pretty one: it's a bleak picture of the future for the villages. The local fishermen are reporting that the sea is already becoming increasingly barren. The manufacturing facilities are going to move in and take over the fertile agricultural lands. These factories will generate various chemicals that will be used in agriculture. This is an example of industrial farming, not the farming practises that are common in the area. And despite the fact that these chemicals would result in a substantial increase in agricultural yield, in the long run they would harm the soil and upset its natural equilibrium. This would create a severe crisis for the agricultural community. Therefore, there are still two ways that it is feasible to survive. One can find work in either the plant or the city. Both of these things are side effects of modernity, and there is no way to avoid them. The unfortunate peasants are going to be the ones to fall into the cruel trap that has been created.

If we think that it is only the rich factory owners who will destroy the poor lives would be wrong. In the conversation another aspect comes up about the role of government in

[194] Desai, *The Village by the Sea*, 91.

the establishment of the factories: "When the government says sell, you will sell all right."[195] When the very government that promises to protect its citizens turns out to be the actual danger, it's hard not to feel helpless over the situation. There is nowhere else to go at this point. The significance of Biju's reaction lies in the fact that it calls into doubt, once more, the intentions of both the business owners and the government. A question naturally arises that why don't they use the undeveloped land to build factories if this is such a crucial step in the growth of the nation? The reason is that the autonomous, self-sufficient systems of subsistence are, in some places, a barrier to the process of shifting everything in favour of capitalists. The unfortunate outcome of this situation may be traced back to a choice that was made by Indian policymakers, who preferred the Western model of economic growth. It was believed that mechanising the fishing process would be helpful because it would increase the catch, which in turn would promise profit. But it did nothing to improve the lives of the struggling fishermen. In addition to this, it led to the continued exploitation of natural resources. Both Gadgil and Guha point out that: "Mechanisation, processing and transport also means a greatly increased dependence on petroleum and other external energy and material inputs. Furthermore, the mechanised craft have continued to fish close by the shore, although the zone is supposed to be reserve for country boats. This has resulted in overfishing and a decline in total fish catch in several states. Unable to compete with mechanised craft, fisher folk have been significantly impoverished."[196]

The destruction is calculated. A similar concern comes from a bullock cart driver who transports Hari to Rewas. This poor local understands that the factories would create a trap for the farmers. Previously fertilisers that were used in fields were organic made out of their own ancient knowledge of farming. But now the factory makes fertilisers which will become

[195] Desai, The *Village by the Sea*, 92.

[196] Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *Ecology and Equity-The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 17.

an utmost requirement for farming. These are expensive and to buy them the farmers would loan money from banks. We begin to realise what this could lead to. The driver says, "That's right. Now we want everything to come from the shop, ready-made. No more spinning of yarn, no more grinding of wheat at home- and no more making of cow dung cakes or compost. I don't know why. What is this new disease? Expensive, that's what it is."[197]

The Indian government, in conjunction with private businesses, is assisting in the construction of factories on land that has a high potential for agricultural production. It's hard to wrap one's head around the total absurdity of the endeavour. The dilemma is whether or not we can legitimately refer to these programmes as developing. Is there any chance that these initiatives will bring any benefit to the people who are economically disadvantaged and whose lives depend primarily on the land and the water? No, it would not. The female authors have an understanding of the quick transition from agricultural to industry that occurred in post-independence India. India is making rapid progress, and projects of modernity serve as an important stepping stone on the path from a newly independent nation to a developing country. Fertilizers made of chemicals can boost productivity, but the negative impacts of using them much outweigh the few positive ones.

Modernity, City and its People:

The city is the foundation upon which contemporary civilization is built. It offers a high standard of living in terms of comfort, luxury, and quality of life. The women authors present a gloomy reality while delving deeply into the conventional notion of the city. The city can be suffocating, unforgiving, and cruel to strangers, particularly those who have moved there from a rural setting. In many of the works by female authors, we keep running into references to the city and the opportunities and challenges it poses for people of varying socioeconomic

[197] Desai, *The Village by the Sea*, 110.

backgrounds. When someone moves from a rural area to a more urban one, they often find themselves in precarious circumstances in the alien and indifferent city. The city breeds individuals who continuously look for comfort, luxury and security. For these people success equates with wealth and power. They believe that the way to achieve these aims is the way of science and technology. Thus when Sita, the protagonist from Desai's novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (2015), becomes pregnant with her fifth child she decides to go to her ancestral village Manori. She has witnessed that a city-centric upbringing has moved her other children away from nature and made them puppets in the hands of a capital oriented system. She finds herself alone in the concrete jungle of the city and wishes to go back to the roots, the wild nature where she belongs. The city may offer safety and security and the village may lack modern amenities and comforts yet the village offers an escape from the absurdities of the modern city:

> The island had been buried beneath her consciousness deliberately, for years. Its black magic, its subtle glamour had grown too huge, had engulfed her at a time when she was still very young and quite alone. She had grown afraid of it, been relieved to leave it and come to the mainland with Raman. The mainland- the very word implied solidity, security, security: the solidity of streets, the security of houses. She had not realized then that living there would teach her only that life was a crust of dull tedium, of hopeless disappointment- but a thin crust, a flimsy crust that, at every second or third step, broke apart so that she tumbled in, with the most awful sensation, into a crashed pile of debris. She had no longer the nerve or optimism to continue. No, she refused to walk another step. She would turn, go back and find the island once more.[198]

She defies convention and departs from the mainland. In contrast to the monotonous and tediously mechanical existence of the urbanized world, she loved the more natural and pure life of the island. As a result, another binary opposition between the mainland and the island is revealed.

[198] Anita Desai, *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 2015), 58.

Kamala Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice* (2008) is a scathing indictment of urban society's tendency to ignore the plight of migrants. The novel *Nectar in a Sieve* by Markandaya explains that this relocation is caused by a number of factors. To begin, the less fortunate people in the village have limited access to the resources necessary to maintain their standard of living since they are already exploited by the local powerful people. Second, the numerous development projects that end up seizing control of their land, forests, and rivers force them to leave for the city. In the novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, we encounter a happy village family that progressively loses control of the land and decides to relocate to the big metropolis. In the novel *A Handful of Rice* the author delves deep into the underbelly of the city. The conflict between the ideal village and the unforgiving city is presented as the central theme of the novel. The metropolis comes across as a hostile and merciless environment for the characters in the story. However, the village itself represents quite a challenge for them. The pains of poverty wreak havoc on the lives of the inhabitants of the village as well: "As far back as he could see they had all lived between bouts of genteel and acute poverty- the kind in which the weakest went to the wall, the old ones and the babies, dying of tuberculosis, dysentery, the 'falling fever' 'recurrent fever' and any other names for what was basically, simply, nothing but starvation. The pattern must have gone on a long time, for generations, because nobody objected, nobody protested, they just kept going, on and on, and were thankful that they were able to."[199] Because of this, they decide to leave the village in order to look for better opportunities in the city. Ravi is the main character of the story, and it is through the character of Ravi and his journey that we witness the limitations of the urban life. Ravi falls back on unethical ways to support himself and his family but his conscience compels him to give up the criminal ways and settle for a life that is morally acceptable. The difficulty is that folks like Ravi have very few opportunities available to them in the city

[199] Kamala Markandaya, *A Handful of Rice* (New Delhi: Penguine Random House, 2008), 9.

environment. While modernity may provide a pretty picture of the city, yet the reality is something else.

Ravi and Damodar first meet in the city of Madras. A city inhabitant named Damodar persuades Ravi to choose unethical means of making money. However, Ravi is forced to give up his unscrupulous ways after getting married to Nalini, the daughter of a tailor named Apu. Two urban individuals who come from comparable socioeconomic backgrounds but have contrasting temperaments are presented. Damodar seeks out easy methods to get money. Apu chooses to live a decent and moral life. Does the honest way of life offer what Ravi has been seeking in this situation? We observe that, despite his desire to work and his adherence to Apu's recommendations, he is shackled to a life of destitution. The trap that modernity has set for people like Ravi is impenetrable. Then he directs his annoyance at Nalini. Ravi assaults her, and she runs away. Meningitis kills Ravi's son. The modern urban city ultimately leads to increased child mortality, women's exploitation, and men's humiliation. When Ravi again seeks Damodar for assistance, he is turned down. For Ravi, the struggle never seems to stop. The narrative concludes with Ravi's desperate hunt for a grain of rice:

> This time, Ravi said to himself as he struggles to reach the grain, this time at least, and he clenched his empty hands and watched with frantic eyes as the rich heap dwindle, and the empty sacks flopped and sagged and were snatched up and filled or humped away full on and shoulders that could bear him. All round him were men driven by the same fear, screaming and fighting in the contaminating rice frenzy, until suddenly there was a shrilling of police whistles, the squeal of braking trucks, a confused shouting, and the thudding of heavy boots.[200]

He ultimately succumbs to socioeconomic oppression and suffers from rootlessness and alienation as a result.

In the novel *The Folded Earth* (2011) written by Anuradha Roy, Charu, a village girl, has a friend who moves to the city in order to find work in the homes of wealthy people and

[200] Markandaya, *A Handful of Rice*, 278.

earn a living wage. He describes his initial thoughts regarding the city in a letter to Charu: "It is a very big city. It has cars, auto rickshaws, and buses. Sometimes there are elephants on the street. This city is so crowded that my eyes cannot go beyond the next house. I feel as if I cannot breath. It smells bad. I remember the smells of the hills. Like when the grass is cut. You cannot hear any birds here, or cows or goats."[201] This letter has been written by a man from the countryside about his experiences of living in the big city, Delhi. A man who hails from the countryside might find life in the city to be excruciatingly oppressive and overwhelmingly suffocating. These men and women describe the city like a hell because it lacks trees, hills, and clean air and sky. Rukmani and Nathan in *The Nectar in a Sieve* and Hari in *The Village by the Sea* have experiences of the city that are similar to one another.

Charu travels to the city as well, and she had a terrible time there. Men who are crafty and brutal dominate Delhi. It seems difficult for a country girl to survive in the city. She is once more saved by a city auto-rickshaw driver who had travelled there from the mountains. There, she runs into Kundan Singh, whom she marries. Though we don't learn much about Charu's daily activities in the city, we do learn that she is in Singapore and that she is fine. Modernity uproots people from their homes and causes displacement. Modernity gives the appearance of a pleasant existence, and in order to get it, one must leave, sometimes voluntarily and sometimes forcibly. Thambi and Arjun, two of Rukmani's sons leave their village in *Nectar in a Sieve* (2007). Both of them begin their jobs in the plant. However, when the factory won't pay them what they're owed, they stop working and are eventually forced to leave for Cylon to work on the tea plantation. Murugan also leaves his land behind to work in a white household in the metropolis.

[201] Anuradha Roy, *The Folded Earth* (Gurgaon: Hachette India, 2011), 5.

Rukmani and Nathan's displacement is the last and most significant instance of modernity's effect on human lives. We observe Rukmani and Nathan embarking on their journey to the metropolis from their rural home. They can no longer cling to anything in the village because everything has been destroyed. They have a son, Murugan, who is living and working in the city, and they want to see him. Ira and Selvam are the only ones who want to remain in the community. They learn upon arrival in the city that their son does not currently reside in the city, and that only his wife and child currently reside there. After that, a number of issues manifest themselves. They have exhausted all of their options for surviving in the city at this point, and they do not even have enough money to travel back to their town. The only way to go back at this point is to work and put money down. The challenge for them, however, is figuring out how they would be able to make a living in a city that is foreign, unforgiving, and unkind to them. These individuals have a tough time finding work in the city because the jobs there require a different set of knowledge and abilities. The words of Nathan are significant in this context: "'Yet the effort must be made', said Nathan, ' for we cannot live except by the land, for I have no other knowledge or skill; and as you say I am getting on and for me it would be impossible to find another landlord.'"[202]

We witness the theft of agricultural land from the people whose very livelihoods are dependent on it as the land of Rukmani is seized by influential individuals for the sake of expanding the factory's existing facilities. As a result of the new model of the world, occupations such as farming and gardening on a small scale are seen as having no value. Because of this, the action is also a legitimate action. Because the owners of the factory have no use for it, its value has decreased. The natives and their rights are essentially stripped away from them. Shiva's explanation of how European invaders views indigenous territories as empty, vacant, and void due to the fact that those lands are not utilised in the same manner

[202] Kamala Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve* (Navi Mumbai: Penguin Books, 2007), 138.

that Europeans would have used it. They considered the fields to be unproductive, which is the primary justification for their seizure and ownership of the properties.[203]

Development creates this cycle from which there is no escape. The poor have to adjust, have to try to live. But it is not easy: "Through the streets of the terrifying city, amid the unaccustomed traffic and crowds, screwing up our courage each time we asked our way, we went slowly along. Some we questioned would not stop to answer, others did not know, many in trying to be helpful directed us wrongly."[204] The simple village people find it extremely hard to be a part of something they know nothing about. They have no idea how the city operates or how they would manage to survive. They only have farming and vegetable-growing skills. On the one hand, they struggle with getting used to city life, while on the other, his son Selvam, who stays in the village, finds it challenging to labour in the fields. According to Kamala Platt, environmental degradation and the eviction of rural and underprivileged farmers into cities are related. She believes that as modernization progresses, the environment degrades, which pushes rural workers towards urban areas.[205] These rural residents are severely impoverished and frequently resettle in areas that are toxic waste dumping sites. In the city Rukmani and Nathan continue to see a decline in their health, and Nathan ultimately passes away following a day of strenuous labour at the site. Nathan can no longer withstand the terrible physical exhaustion that is being inflicted on him. It is too much for a man who has never hauled garbage made of concrete or broken stones. His hands are skilled in farming. The conclusion of the story of Nathan serves as the culmination of the chain of unfortunate occurrences that shake up Rukmani's life. After everything, Rukmani

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[203] Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2010).

[204] Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, 156.

[205] Kamala Platt, "Ecocritical Chicana Literature: Ana Castillo's Virtual Realism," in *Ecofeminist Litarary acriticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, ed. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 145.

and Puli make their way back to their native village, where they observe yet another transformation taking place there.

Such a scenario emerges in Anita Desai's *Village by the Sea* when Hari comes to Mumbai. He begins to work in a roadside hotel. The owner lives in a slum and the toxic surroundings of the place is mentioned time and again. It can be assumed that the family of the owner came from a village and resettled in the city though the condition of such places in the city is not suited for living. Platt like many other ecofeminism writers and activists believes that the call for environmental justice turns into a necessity if local and ultimate global equity is to be established. And women, Platt believes, "have been key players in conceptualising and disseminating cultural work that promotes environmental justice."[206]

In yet another Kamala Markandaya novel In *The Coffer Dams*, we may observe how modernization causes a village to transform into a town. A group of people in India are building dams, and as a result of this new addition, village life gradually starts to change. We have a similar situation in *Nectar in a Sieve*. The lives of the impoverished villagers are completely upended by the tannery industry, which is located on the outskirts of the community. The nation-building initiatives considered by the architects of contemporary India include the factory and the dams. These initiatives modify a village's appearance in addition to changing lives. A town is created out of a hamlet. Numerous lives, both human and non-human, are impacted by the process of transforming a village into a town. Many times, women novelists have equated the town to the man and the village to the woman. The novel begins with an interesting line: "It was a man's town."[207] The line gives us a glimpse inside the novel. The town is man's as it is created and ruled by them. A town is built with

[206] Kamala Platt, *Ecofeminist Litarary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 145.

[207] Kamala Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams* (Navi Mumbai: Penguin Random House, 2008), 1.

concrete and in the process nature is destroyed. On the other hand, the village with its greenery, its natural richness is a place they call home and it is equated with the woman: "The Great Dam, it had been called not by him, he was too absorbed by the work in hand for objectively excess, but by people of the Maidan and the Malnad, the plains and hill country people, who had watched with awe the precipitate birth of a town in the jungle."[208]

A town is emerging in the forest, and Clinton and his team are enforcing colonial control against unspoiled nature. What follows is a world that long avoided the enormous transformation known as industrialization will soon be subjugated by the latest wave of development. This notion of development is a Western import. This idea of development looks to human accomplishments, gorgeous structures, and concrete buildings over land and control over the sea as evidence of advancement. Nature is viewed as a force that may be subdued and mastered. The dam's construction is the white masters' top priority in this novel. For them, nothing else matters. The development initiative poses a threat to nature, ecology, and the people whose survival depends on it, but its creators are unfazed by the repercussions. Preparation is necessary for the process of erecting the large construction. The hills are being used to create roads. Markandaya writes: "It was virtually a small industrial town, gouged and blasted out of the hillside."[209] Gradually around the project many other forms of development take place. Roads are curved out of hills, worker's quarters, engineer's bungalow, water tower, ice and filtration plant power stations everything come into being in the hill side. The great heart of a mega project begins to beat.

In Anuradha Roy's *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (2009) we witness a village Songarh slowly turning into an industrial land. Songarh is located in West Bengal. The area is abundant in resources and natural beauty. The locals refer to it as a town, while Amulya

[208] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 2.

[209] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 2.

views it as a hamlet because there are only a few scattered concrete structures. Recently, the small town's reputation has expanded beyond its borders. It has been discovered that the land is rich in mica resources. This discovery changes the place. Roy mentions that the Britishers have found the resource and have also claimed that the land is rich in other important resources as well. Investors, business owners, and employees gradually start to settle in the village and establish their own communities. The gradual change has been pointed out in the following lines by Roy:

> When Amulya brought his family to Songarh, it was no longer a centre of learning, but it had acquired new importance after the discovery by the imperial geologists of ores of mica. There was even more lucrative material below the forests somewhat further away: coal. Among the patchy fields of millet and greens there grew a tiny British colony of people who supervised the coal mines and the bearer mica ores from the salubrious climate of Songarh, which was chilly enough in winter for log fires. Before long the town had a white area near the fort where the handful of miners lived, forming a compact society of their own.[210]

The change Roy mentions is watched by the wild life and the jungle silently. She points out that until the discovery of the mica resource the jungle has been a happy place where wild animals roam freely. It is only after the mining starts the whole forest ecosystem has been affected. The lives of the animals and the tribal communities that depend on the forest have been disrupted. As the mining progresses Roy writes: "Some were forced into the town when the mines gouged out chunks of their forest. They lived in makeshift shanties, working at whatever they could find."[211]

The Female authors give us the glimpse of the process in which the village is gradually being transformed. The green is systematically destroyed by the implementers of modernity. The sheer thrill of implementing the project of modernity is so intense and overwhelming that the masters are unaware of the ill effects of it over the people and nature.

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[210] Anuradha Roy, *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (India: Picador India, 2009), 11.

[211] Roy, *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, 11.

Vandana Shiva, an Ecofeminist activist of India explains how modernity systematically destroys nature and lives of people. She writes: "Dams, mines, energy plants, military bases- these are the temples of the new religion called 'development', a religion that provides the rationale for the modernising state, its bureaucracies and technologies." [212]

Conclusion:

When we examine the novel, Shiva's theories[213] are demonstrated to be accurate. It is the dam in *The Coffer Dams*, the military base in *The Folded Earth*, the chemical factory in *Village by the Sea*, the tannery factory in *Nectar in a Sieve*, and the pharmaceutical factory in *Fire on the Mountain*, the mica reserve in Roy's *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* that are the sources of misfortune for the people of the land. All of these so-called development projects wreak havoc on the lives of the underprivileged villagers. According to Shiva, this type of growth strategy is predicated on the destruction of societies and communities as well as the relocating of individuals. There is usually a segment of the local population in many of the novels, including *Nectar in a Sieve*, *Village by the Sea*, and *The Coffer Dams*, that thinks that modernity will benefit them. Developmental initiatives would give them security, access to food, and would end poverty. But many people, particularly in the Third World where the development model fails to improve people's lives, have questioned such presumptions. Instead, it dismantles sustainable and diverse systems that support life. Shiva feels that the recovery of the feminine principle in nature can dismantle the patriarchal foundations of mal-development[214]. It can give us a new definition of growth and sustainable development: "It was no place for women."[215] The statement is suggestive. In the industrial setup where men

[212] Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (New Delhi: Rawat Publication, 2007), 98.

[213] Vandana Shiva. *Staying Alive* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited. 2004).

[214] Vandana Shiva. *Staying Alive* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited. 2004), 6.

[215] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 6.

are the primary decision-makers women seldom find a space. Here her role ceases to exist and she is only left to be exploited in the hands of capitalist patriarchy.

In these texts, the city comes to symbolize a life that is governed by rules and regulations. Villages that have become self-sufficient via the application of modern technology and industry eventually give way to the formation of cities. It is designed for people who value comfort, money, and safety in equal measure. The hollow core of the urban space, however, is something that these female authors never fail to bring to light. It is also true that the city can provide resources for survival, as it did for Rukmani and Nathan when they ended up losing their lands as a result of modernization. This was demonstrated by the fact that the city was able to offer these resources. And during that time of peril, there was nowhere else for them to go besides the city. The city provides them with the thing they require most in order to live: money. In the novel *Fire on the Mountain*, the character Nanda experiences the city as a space that she finds to be suffocating. The reason for this is that the city is predominately a masculine space, and as a result, it is extremely difficult for women to find a place in which they can freely express their opinions or lead independent lives.

The events that take place in the city have left Nanda with a profound sense of disappointment. Maya, the protagonist of *The Folded Earth*, is forced to flee her hometown after the death of her husband. The overwhelming number of people starts to have an effect on her. She wants a place to ponder, a quiet area; so, she comes to Ranikhet, a village located in the mountains. Nanda too decides to do that. Her relocation to Carignano, a house near Kasauli, is one of the steps she is taking to piece together her shattered identity. Desai's second novel, *Village by the Sea*, also paints a vision of the city that is similar to the other depictions of urbanity. It is a suffocating location, especially for individuals who are used to living in a village, beneath the clear blue sky, with the rugged mountain range or the boundless ocean. Hari leaves the village by the sea and travels to the city in order to find

work and provide for his family. Even though the city helps these characters like Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve* or Hari in *Village by the sea* by providing them with opportunities, the city can never give them the solace or a sense of belonging that they have in their own land, amidst nature. The horrifying images of the city serve as a constant reminder that the city will never be able to provide them with the thing that they long for most, peace.

Another woman named Ila Das, a friend of Nanda's, is the source of a highly scathing critique of the city and the sophisticated urban life that it entails. At first glance, she appears to be lacking in depth; nonetheless, she ultimately succeeds in illuminating for us the inner workings of the city. She was born and raised in the city, so she was afforded all of the advantages that come with being an urban woman. However, she believes that urbanity or modernism has rendered her helpless. She is aware of the negative consequences that can arise from uncritically imitating Western civilization. It undermines the self-sustaining structure on which the lives of a great number of people living in Third World countries depend. The modern world may be able to provide numerous conveniences, but at its core, it is motivated by financial gain. Ila experiences the horrors of civilization, and as a result, she makes the decision to redeem herself among the mountain people and their country. In the beginning, she comes out as a rather superficial woman; however, she turns out to be much wiser than we have anticipated. Her observation regarding modernity is of utmost significance: "'Isn't it absurd,' she rattled on, 'how helpless our upbringing made us, Nanda. We thought we were being equipped with the very best- French lessons, piano lessons, English governess-my , all that only to find it left us helpless, positively handicapped.'"[216] It is obvious that she is pessimistic about contemporary, urban lifestyles due to her desperation about being unable to live the life she formerly did. The validity of her observation, however, cannot be disputed. Because of her time living in the mountains and interacting with the

[216] Anita Desai, *Fire on the Mountain* (Haryana: Random House India, 2015), 139.

locals, she has learned that it is preferable to lead a self-sufficient lifestyle to a flimsy urban one that can at any point fall apart due to a lack of money. She claims that farmers who produce their own food through laborious field work are happier than she is.

The women who live in extreme poverty believe that moving to the city may be their last chance at a better life, in contrast to the wealthy upper-class ladies who yearn for a retreat in the mountain villages. In point of fact, the city is a dream for those people who have given up all chance of surviving in their original village due to modernization or exploitative power structures within specific communities. In books such as Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, we have encountered examples of immigration on a massive scale. Because of the advances made by contemporary technology, Rukmani and Nathan, like with their sons before them, were forced to uproot themselves and abandon their village and their roots. Likewise, in this part of *The Village by the Sea*. Hari departs from Thul in order to travel to Bombay: "Bombay! He stared out of the window at the stars that shone in the sky and wondered if the lights of the city could be as bright, or brighter. It was a rich city: if he could get there, he might be able to make money, bring home riches, pieces of gold and silver with which to dazzle his sisters."[217]

He prefers the city to the hapless existence in his village because: "Everything belonged here, everything blended together-except for himself. With his discontent, his worries and his restlessness, he could not settle down to belonging."[218] Finally, Hari has arrived in Bombay. He has a sense of purpose because of Bombay. He wants to live in the city, make money, and provide for his family. Even though there are opportunities, there are other parts of the city that seem cold and cruel. Hari perceives Bombay as being overwhelmingly large. There are more people crammed in there. They constantly seem to be

[217] Desai, *The Village by the Sea*, 45.

[218] Desai, *The Village by the Sea*, 59.

in a rush. Every single one of them is constantly busy. The poor villagers who first arrive in the city are completely helpless in the face of all the events going on all around them. Hari no longer sees the city of dreams as a paradise; rather, he finds it to be oppressive. The city that we hold up as the pinnacle of contemporary civilization falls short of convincing people like Hari that it is a better place. Both the setting and the locals are foreign to him. In the city, Hari is yelled at, called names, and even urged to return to his rightful home. These are the instances where we get to see how unforgiving the city is. No one is willing to accept them; no one listens to their side of the story. The purpose for which Hari made it to the city remains unfulfilled as it appears absolutely impossible for the village people to go and meet the leaders to talk of the crisis they face: the factory and its ill effects over the lives of the farmers and the fishermen. Desai again takes her stand against modernity that manifests itself in the city.

Hari has decided to remain in Bombay in spite of the difficulties. Hari's last chance of survival lies with the de Silva family, who have offered him a position working in their household. Hari comes to know that the family has gone to the village Thul. Hari's hope of finding job in the city is shattered as a result of their departure. Hari, who is forlorn and helpless, finds a friend in Hira Lal, who works as the liftman at the de Silva apartment building. The number of people who Hari counts as friends continues to grow. A watchmaker named Mr. Panwallah offers to be his guide across the city. Hari is instructed in the craft of creating watches. He finds new employment in a quaint eatery that is owned and operated by Jagu. The story progresses as Hari's life in Bombay starts to take shape, and we start to witness how a city like Bombay reveals itself to a villager like Hari. These men, who have been forced to leave their estates, have no choice but to relocate to the city. There's more to the magnificent metropolis of Bombay than meets the eye. The city is home not only of the

wealthy and well-to-do but also of the destitute and impoverished. These individuals' lives are consumed by filth, pollution, sickness and the hunger that they constantly face.

We get a glimpse of how unbearably difficult life is in this section of the city when Hari is taken to Jagu's house and shown around. When he comes into contact with people who dwell in the destitute slums, the city loses its lustre in his eyes. Once more, it seems that the city is a site of great contrasts. The advent of modernity does not ensure that everyone will lead a happy life. It is only open to a limited number of people. This group of people, the rich people, get to enjoy the luxury and the comforts of city life; the poor people, on the other hand, are compelled to go in a city for the primary reason that their means of subsistence, their homes, and their lands have been devastated by the victories of modernity. Gadgil and Guha have coined the term 'ecological refugees' to refer to those people who leave rural areas in search of urban life. They observe: "This complex processing favouring a narrow elite of omnivores at the cost of masses of ecosystem people has created, too, large numbers of ecological refugees in the hinterlands. These have flocked to the cities, to which the state has channelled resources, from all over the country."[219]

Hari finds work, manages to get wages but his equation with the city remains a complex one: "Now his head filled with thoughts of that first night in Bombay, how amazed he had been by the lights, the great buildings, the crowds. He thought of the block of flats, the lift that had taken him up as if by magic, the polished door that opened on to that shining room, and the haughty servant in white clothes."[220] And again his thoughts bring him back to his own Thul: "He thought of the sails one saw along the horizon, and the lights of the boats by night which were visible from the beach. He thought of the catch coming in the evening,

[219] Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *Ecology and Equity: the Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 32.

[220] Desai, *The Village by the Sea*, 194.

the voice of the women quarrelling over the baskets of shining fish on the sand...He thought of Lila coming down the path...He thought he heard Pinto bark...How he longed for them all. Sitting down on his heels by the fire, he put his head on his knees, shut his eyes and tried hard to see them again- beautiful and bright, his own."[221]

Many ecofeminist theorists think that because the modern paradigm of development is practised mostly in the West, the East has been able to avoid being corrupted by the negative influences it has brought about. However, these novels demonstrate that the East is not immune to the greater repercussions of modernization in some way or another. Both Ranikhet in Roy's *The Folded Earth* and the mountain terrain Kausali in Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* are unable to evade the clutches of modernity in their respective stories. In *The Folded Earth*, we see how grazing places for animals are taken from them in an immoral and coercive manner so that a military facility may be constructed. During the time of colonial rule, it was common practise for settlers to maintain access to grazing areas by various means. Guha observes: "The maltreatment of the grazing requirements of India's large livestock in maintaining the fertility of farmlands and as a source of power for tilling and rural transport has been largely neglected." [222]

It may be a matter of civilising a primitive region, strengthening the military, or constructing a factory to boost the economy; whatever the case may be, all of these things are evidence of progress as measured by the western concept of development. Characters like Nanda, Raka, Maya, and Rukmani are all victims of modernization, which is trusted by a section of powerful males. This is true even though these women resist it. And it is through their engagement with the natural world that they are brought to the realisation that the

[221] Desai, *The Village by the Sea*, 197.

[222] Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha. *Ecology and Equity- The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 24.

natural world also suffers at the hands of the powerful and the privileged. They reside in cities and are aware of how insufficient cities are at fostering harmony. In pursuit of what they themselves have lost, they travel to the village in the middle of nature.

The ecofeminist question that arises from this is whether or not modernity can actually bring about good changes. The western model of progress and development revolves around profit, money, and power. This is the foundation upon which it is constructed. And it is extremely detrimental to the individuals who are impoverished and on the margins of society. In her article titled "The Root of Ecofeminism,"[223] Barbara T. Gates provides an explanation for a significant portion of Eaubonne's theories, views, and propositions. She brings up the fact that Eaubonne is of the opinion that an ecofeminist point of view is the only one that can preserve the globe. The policies that are enforced by governments are the source of the problem. Eaubonne continues by posing significant questions, such as why the government does not take into account the damage done to nature by various development projects. Why does it believe that the sole benefit is an expanding economy? Why do the policies that are made by government institutions ignore the rights of marginalised and indigenous communities? These are the sorts of inquiries that ecofeminists make, and they believe that taking an ecofeminist stance is the key to finding a solution to the issue.

[223] Barbara T. Gates, "The Root of Ecofeminism," in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, ed. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 17.

CHAPTER FOUR

Issues of Gender, Class and Race

"Intersectional ecofeminism also underscores the importance of gender, race and class, interlinking feminist concerns with human oppressions within patriarchy and the exploitations of a natural environment that women are often more reliant upon but also its guardians in many cultural contexts."[224]

Introduction:

The study of the connection between women and the natural world is at the heart of ecofeminism. Women all around the world have been vocal in their opposition to the environmental destruction caused by a group of powerful people whenever there has been a crisis in the environment. And via these protests, one becomes aware of the powers of patriarchy as a whole, as well as the manner in which these forces dominate women and nature. When we talk about maintaining the environment, it is imperative that we address the issue of women, as I have done in earlier chapters. In addition to this, the questions of racial inequality, social class, as well as any other kinds of dominance, need to be addressed. All of these marginalised segments of society are connected by the common thread of oppression. When we address these marginal issues, there comes to light a connection between these marginal entities, and their fight to live in a world that is governed by capitalist patriarchy. The common history of the subjugation of women and of the natural environments serves as the most significant point of connection for ecofeminists. Emancipation of women, in their view, is impossible to achieve within the context of the pre-existing power dynamics that underpin our global order. When discussing how to alter the existing system, ecofeminists

[224] Fatimah Kelleher, " Why the World Needs an African Ecofeminist Future", *Equal Times (blog),* March 28, 2019, https://www.equaltimes.org/why-the-world-needs-an-african?lang=en

place equal weight on the problems of racism, social class, and gender because these are facets that simply cannot be ignored. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy write: "Ecofeminism is based not only on the recognition of a connection between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women across patriarchal societies. It is also based on the recognition that these two forms of domination are bound up with class exploitation, racism, colonialism and neo-colonialism."[225] A comparable power equation is responsible for the construction of the hierarchical structure that exists within race, gender, and class. The patriarchal system of capitalism exerts its authority over all other subordinate groups, including the native people of the area, the working class, women, and nature. Starhawk, an ecofeminist critic, explains that ecofeminism is a movement that seeks to investigate all types of hegemony. She believes that environmental issues should not be tackled from a single perspective; rather, she believes that it is imperative to include the concerns of women, people with low incomes, people from other parts of the world, as well as people of other racial and cultural backgrounds.[226]

In the book *Ecofeminism* Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva discuss the plight of women, and in particular the plight of rural women, who directly suffer the effects of environmental devastation. For instance, they cite the various instances of environmental catastrophes that occurred in different parts of the world, such as the Bhopal Gas Tragedy (1984) in India, the Chernobyl Catastrophe in Russia (1986). When it comes to protests against atrocities committed by the state in response to such tragic calamities, women have played an active role in the movement. Shiva writes: "Our 'no' to war coincides with our struggle for liberation. Never have we seen so clearly the connection between nuclear escalation and the

[225] Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, "Introduction," in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism. Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, ed. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (USA: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 3.

[226] Starhawk, "Power, Authority, and Mystery: Ecofeminism and Earth – Based Spirituality," in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, ed. Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990), 75.

culture of the muscleman; between the violence of war and the violence of rape."[227] There is a correlation between the dominance of men over nature and the coercive control that is exercised over a woman's physical being. Both are products of the idea that one is superior to something else, in this case, the woman or nature.

Ecofeminism and Gender:

According to ecofeminists, the historical oppression of both women and nature, as well as the fact that both hold marginal positions within the prevailing social paradigms, point to a significant relationship between them. The Western conception of science and knowledge provides an explanation for why contemporary value systems view nature as a resource while placing women in a subordinate position. The West sees science as universal, knowledge as value- neutral. Following these paths, West has come to arrive at objective claims about nature. Many have realised that the widely accepted science-based systems only act as a liberating force for some people, rather than for everyone. This endeavour, which we now refer to as knowledge, has evolved into a task that is traditionally associated with men and the patriarchal system. Because of this, women and nature have been forced into subservience. Shiva makes reference to enlightenment thinkers like Francis Bacon (1561-1626) who played a part in the construction of such an antiquated concept of science and knowledge. She feels that Bacon's programme is not inclusive of nature, women and the marginal groups. It only benefits the white European male. She writes: **"**In Bacon's experimental method, which was central to this masculine project, there was a dichotomy between male and female, mind and nature, objective and subjective, rational and emotional, and a conjunction of masculine and scientific dominating over nature, women and the west."[228]

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[227] Gaard and Murphy, *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism*, 15.

[228] Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2004), 16.

Shiva feels that contemporary science is skewed toward males and is dominated by patriarchal values. Nature has come to be regarded as a marginal entity, and it is placed in the same category as other marginal entities. After that, these are subjected to dominance, control, and exploitation. She argues that patriarchy encourages this power structure that is founded on science and technology in order to carry out injustices towards the environment as well as women and other marginal beings. This structure has been the foundation of the rising industrial capitalism. In addition, Carolyn Merchant is a strong supporter of women's and environmental rights. In this aspect, the ways of thinking of Vandana Shiva and Carolyn Merchant are comparable to one another.[229] Merchant describes the concept that Shiva refers to as the "feminine principle"[230] as the notion that the cosmos is both animistic and biological. We are witnesses to the destruction of nature whenever such an image of the cosmos is eradicated from the knowledge system. As soon as nature is understood as an aggregation of inanimate and lifeless particles, it becomes much simpler to manipulate. The purpose of ecofeminism is to investigate the history of how contemporary science became dominated by a masculinist ideology, and as a result, how modern science can be said to be gendered. Through the destruction of nature and the exploitation of its resources, it serves the purpose of the dominant Western cultures. Evidently, ecofeminists are more concerned with the ideological than the historical aspects of modern science.

The novels on which this research is based mostly discuss the relationships and connections that exist between women and the natural world. In the chapter titled "Many Women, Many Bonds," the various ways in which women and the natural world might be connected to one another has been discussed. The ways in which women relate to nature, the ways in which women express themselves in nature, and the ways in which women from

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[229] Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 14.

[230] Shiva, *Staying Alive*, 16.

different backgrounds come to create unique connections with their environment are all issues that have been explored. One characteristic consistent in all those unique associations is a definite eco-consciousness. These women protagonists appreciate the significance of preserving nature and the delicate balance it maintains. Sometimes it comes from a deeper, more spiritual connection, and other times it comes from a more materialistic connection. One such connection that is absolutely necessary for ecofeminists is their common experience of being oppressed in the past. This chapter aims to demonstrate that the dominant male patriarchal capitalist attitude is at the heart of both the subjugation of women and the exploitation of nature's resources. It is necessary for ecofeminists to explore this matter in order to prove that all forms of dominance, regardless of whether they are based on race, gender, or class, emanate from the same source: the capitalist patriarchy.[231] They stem from the same origin, and the emancipation of one is not conceivable without the emancipation of the other. There are many ways in which both forms of dominance and exploitation of nature are identical. Therefore, ecofeminists believe that a shift in the established social order is required in order to liberate not only women but also other marginalised groups and the natural world.

In Anuradha Roy's novel *The Folded Earth*, the topic of gender is brought up multiple times throughout the story. Maya serves as an example of a woman who is subjected to patriarchal norms and expectations within the context of her family. The fact that her father has authority over the choices that she makes, the fact that he disapproved of her getting married to the person of her choice, and the fact that he forced her to live apart from her mother all contribute to Maya's perception of her father as a controlling force in her life. After the untimely passing of her companion in the Himalayas, she ultimately makes the

[231] "Women and Nature? Beyond Dualism in Gender, Body, and Environment", ed. Douglas A. Vakoch and Sam Mickey (New York: Routledge, 2018).

decision to settle down in Ranikhet. There, she is confronted with situations that are eerily similar to those she experienced with her father. She comes to the realisation as a result of her interactions with the men that in addition to their disregard for women, they also violate the sacredness of nature and its surroundings. She gets her first experience with high-class individuals when she meets the influential people in the town at the Aspen Lodge. These people have a condescending attitude toward women and they also have no regard for the natural world. They talk about civilising the hill town by eliminating the wilderness, disrupting the natural equilibrium, and destroying the unspoiled beauty of the area, but at the same time, they believe that the education of women, particularly the education and well-being of village girls, is of little worth. There is a conversation that takes place between Maya and the General, and through it, we learn how patriarchal and capitalist attitudes view both women and nature as lower in status than men. This mentality prevents women from intellectually developing, which in turn prevents them from questioning the system and the societal inequities that exist. This paints a picture of the social landscape and demonstrates that women become a danger to the system when they challenge and fight against the dominance of the male patriarchy. At the party, we encounter a different woman whose name is Kusumji. She is acquainted with the political climate that prevails in that place. She asks uncomfortable questions to the men of power who glorify war and violence. Her concerns about the atrocities of the state over the people at the border areas and specially the hardships of women irk the men. This is significant from an ecofeminist standpoint because the concerns brought by Kusumji expose the irrationality of the individuals who make decisions regarding war. The mentality is the same as it would be in the case of waging war against nature. These folks have an erroneous concept of grandeur and an equally erroneous concept of progress in their heads, and as a result, they have the potential to endanger the lives of other people and exploit nature for their egotistical ends. Because of this, these issues, which

involve the exploitation of nature and the innocent people at the hands of a small number of powerful men, are not distinct issues. The space offered by ecofeminism allows one to investigate the covert, underhanded practises of dominance that are applied to all marginalised groups.

Patriarchy and the Private World of Women:

The private lives of the women are seen to be governed by the same power dynamics that govern the outside world. In this novel, *The Folded Earth* (2011), Roy uncovers the ways that male patriarchy operates, sometimes in the public domain and other times in the home. Maya recalls her father's life throughout the book. Her father would like his daughter to take over the family business after him. A sense of "perverse pride," as Roy describes it, for his daughter is evidently a result of his disappointment at not having a male child. Every significant choice in her life is made by her father. We can observe how male patriarchy operates in an Indian woman's private world. In this novel, her father's inability to accept Michal as Maya's partner, his refusal to patiently listen to what his daughter wants, and his complete lack of interest in either Maya or her mother's perspectives are examples of male patriarchal dominance in her family. Within a family, delicate power politics are performed through interpersonal interactions. Maya and her father have a master-and-apprentice relationship. She has frequently referred to her father as the 'master', the 'unquestionable master', and herself as the 'disciple', or the 'follower'. By leaving her family and being married to Michel, Maya disobeys her father and has shown defiance to patriarchy. According to ecofeminists this power struggle that takes place in women's private lives is comparable to the power dynamic that exists in the public sphere. In both the worlds, men have the preeminent voice, and it is men who decide what will happen to women and also to the outside nature. We have seen how the General expresses his opposition to women's education and how the same individual decides to modernise the area by destroying its

tranquil natural harmony. They all give a damn about what the 'other' says or wants, even the General, the Brigadier, and Maya's father. Their own perverted vanity, which views both women and nature as resource determines what they believe to be modern and moral.

A similar character is Mr. Dandekar in Kamala Markandaya's *A Silence of Desire* (2009). In this novel, the female protagonist Sarojini is shown to be worshipping a Tulasi plant. This aspect of perceiving the divine in elements of nature is a common aspect within Hindu religion and culture. However, her husband mocks Sarojini and dismisses the veneration of the plant as superstition. The Tulasi is more than just a plant to Sarojini; it plays a big role in her spiritual inner world. Markandaya writes: "It was a small ever green plant, crammed into bright and decorative brass in which it languished, surviving without health, but with a sharp, imperious smell that made you forget its looks- a smell that clung to your hands until you had washed and scrubbed, and even after, and could haunt you if you did not pray."[232]

Dandekar is the representative figure of patriarchy. He constantly criticises his wife's beliefs. He subscribes to the Western idea of science and reason and thereby looks down upon her rituals as unscientific. On the one hand, he looks upon nature as an inanimate component devoid of any divinity; on the other hand, he looks upon Sarojini as a provider devoid of any desire of her own: "She was a good wife, Sarojini: good with children, an excellent cook, an efficient manager of his household, a woman who still gives him pleasure after fifteen years of marriage, less from the warmth of her response than from her unfailing acquiescence to his demands."[233] When Sarojini visits a spiritual healer for healing, a similar circumstance occurs. This time, she rejects Dandekar's assertion that only contemporary medicine is capable of curing illnesses. This time around, Dandekar also makes her change

[232] Kamala Markandaya, *A Silence of Desire* (New Delhi: Penguin Random House, 2009), 1.

[233] Markandaya, *A Silence of Desire*, 2.

her conduct and pay attention to what he says. It is only Sarojini's ability to serve Dandekar and the family that makes her desirable. It is also nature's function to be a provider that makes it important. In both cases the attitude of the dominating man is same: looking upon the 'other' as inferior and a resource to be used.

Another of Markandaya's novels *Nectar in a Sieve* (2007) tells the story of Rukmani, a village woman whose life is completely upended as a result of the development project in the form of a tannery factory. The lives of the villagers are irreparably changed the moment modernity is introduced into their community, and the women and the children are the group that is hit the worst by these changes. In the same way that modernity views nature and natural resources as something to manage and exploit as a prerequisite for prosperity and growth, males view women as something they should dominate in order to claim superiority. Therefore, it is clear that there is a connection between these two modes of thinking. From the very beginning, Markandaya depicts the precarious position that women find themselves in the post-independence rural society.

Rukmani gets married to Nathan primarily because her parents think that it is the only viable option for her. She has settled down with her husband Nathan, a farmer who comes from a more modest background than the one she has been raised by her parents. This happens because her father could not manage enough dowry to get her married to a wealthy family: "Our relatives, I know, murmured that the match was below me; my mother herself was not happy, but I was without beauty and without dowry and it was the best she could do. 'A poor match', they said, and not always quietly. How little they knew, any of them."[234] In patriarchal societies, a woman is considered of limited value if she does not possess beauty in a traditional sense and a dowry. Because of this, she does not have the opportunity to choose

[234] Kamala Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve* (Navi Mumbai: Penguin Random House, 2007), 4.

who she marries or to have a proper education so that she may demonstrate her worth. In addition to her marriage, Rukmani's incomplete education is a direct consequence of the negative patriarchal practises that are prevalent in the society. But Nathan turns out to be a good man, and Rukmani's initial unease disappears in the cheerful company of her husband. Later, Rukmani finds consolation and contentment in nature, when she works in her garden and nature provides her with enough. Rukmani considers her garden to be her personal space and a location that brings her joy. To begin, Rukmani develops into a unique individual within nature. There is a one-to-one correspondence between the plenitude of nature and her propensity to bring forth new life. When she works outside in nature, the instincts are profoundly in sync. In addition, there is another reason why she favours working in her backyard rather than her field, which is because the field is where the men do their labour. Her work in the domestic environment is deemed less important as a means of money and survival in comparison to the crop, which belongs to the male and is regarded as more vital by him.

In spite of the fact that the job done by women is regarded as having less value in market economies, there is nevertheless a harmonious cohabitation of the labours done by men and women in the home. Both Rukmani and Nathan are depicted labouring in the field together over the course of this story. There is an equal engagement from both sexes in this activity. Ecofeminists feel that gender inequality is caused by advancement that is based on Western conceptions of what modernity should be. The modernization process gives rise to new hierarchical structures. Both men and women make contributions of equal value when they work in nature. Nathan and Rukmani are involved in the work at the field. Both of them provide for their family by cultivating a wide variety of foods. In this case, "diversity" is the answer to a healthy and prosperous way of life. When modernisation of begins, it poses a danger to diversity; inequity in the gender equation emerges as a result. Modernisation

fragments and on the other hand advocates uniformity. Shiva writes: “Fragmentation and uniformity as assumed categories of progress and development destroy the living forces which arise from relationship within the web of life and diversity is the element and patterns of these relationships.”[235]

In today's industrial civilizations, women, peasants, and communities traditionally associated with tribal groups are all marginalised. They are considered resources and inputs into the system. Male labour is the only kind that can be considered valuable and productive in the current world. This presumption serves as the foundation for the plan for economic development. Shiva thinks: “The devaluation and de-recognition of nature’s work and productivity has led to ecological crisis; the devaluation and de-recognition of women’s work has created sexism and inequality between men and women.”[236]

The shift away from organic and diversified food production toward cash-cropping coincides with the introduction of industrial agriculture. Because of these developments, women are being forced out of the procedures that are involved in the manufacturing of food, as these processes are now controlled by corporate houses and are being carried out by men. The ability of women to use the land is being severely curtailed, and the resulting impacts are devastating. It is detrimental to the well-being of the family as a whole, particularly the children; in addition, the mother loses control over her household and is forced to rely solely on the financial security provided by the male members.[237] The concept of progress in Western culture is essentially reductionist, which makes it incapable of dealing with the concept of equality in diversity. Consequently, what is currently regarded to be growth and production are, in reality, restricted patriarchal categories.

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[235] Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2004), 3.

[236] Shiva, *Staying Alive*, 44.

[237] Bina Agarwal, *A Field of One’s Own- Gender and Land Rights in South Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Rukmani is concerned that the new development project in her community will cause disruption to people's lives, whereas Nathan believes that the factory will be a source of money for the less fortunate locals. The more she witnesses how the children's lives are being affected by the tannery, the more concerned she becomes about her own children. When it comes to Nathan, none of these issues appear to exist. First and foremost, as a man, he is thinking about getting a job like the other people in the hamlet. He does not have the foresight that Rukmani does. And because of this deficiency, he was able to hand over to Kunthi portions of the produce that Rukmani had set aside for her children to eat. We later learn that Nathan has an affair with Kunthi while Rukmani is unaware of it. In later scenes, Nathan is seen to be pleased with the birth of his son. Her first child is Ira, a girl. And we do not see a similar expression of joy in case of Ira. When Rukmani gives birth to a son, her father visits the hospital to meet and embrace his new grandson. The society places a higher importance on sons than it does on daughters. Because of this, Ira's life once she gets married becomes a living nightmare because she is unable to have children, and in particular, sons. She is sent back to Rukmani after enduring a great deal of suffering at the hands of Ira's in-laws. Ira starts taking care of Rukmani's youngest son. Ira, too, is regarded as having no worth because she is unable to bear a child of her own. When living in a patriarchal society, a woman loses authority over her own body; there is no room for debate on the woman's right to make her own decisions. The males are the ones who make the decisions. In this regard, we are able to make a comparison between the dominance over nature and the control that the capitalist patriarchy exercises over a woman's body. In the case of Ira, her value is constrained by the resources that she possesses. In the event that she does not give birth to a male heir, she is seen as having no worth. Similarly, in a capitalist economy, nature is only regarded valued if it serves the interests of humans. The issue of control is the second point of parallelism that can be drawn between the two. Ira does not have authority over her body,

especially in regards to her sexuality and reproductive systems. It is up to man to decide what will happen to her. And when she is forced to stay with her parents after being refused to be accepted in her in-law's place we find her engaged in prostitution. Later we discover that Ira has become pregnant because of her encounter with a white man. The people in the community see the child that she gives birth to as peculiar due to the fact that he appeared unusual.

The forced violation of her body by a white man is comparable, in a metaphorical sense, to the capitalist-white man's violation of nature. Her body is violated in the same way. The effects of civilization can be seen on both nature and Ira. In her article titled "A Root of Ecofeminism," Barbara T. Gates makes the argument that women in societies that are ruled by men are subject to control over all aspects of their lives, including reproduction. She has also established a connection between this kind of dominance over women's bodies and the control that males have over the world. She writes: "Urbanized, technological society, which is male driven, has reduced the earth's fertility, while over breeding, also male driven, has increased population. Women must act to save themselves and the earth simultaneously."[238]

The men decide what is valuable in a woman. And it is this mentality that leads to her submission in the hands of the foreign workers working in the factory where she is forced to engage in prostitution. The women are violated and forced to submission by the men who destroy the sacredness of nature for their own egocentric ends. It is impossible for women to provide for themselves and their children in the current environment. In the past, women played an important part in ensuring that the household remained in a state of equilibrium. In addition to the males, she was able to generate a sufficient amount of food to provide a wholesome and fulfilling existence for her offspring. But as the means by which she

[238] Barbara T. Gates, " A Root of Ecofeminism," in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, ed. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 17.

maintained that sense of safety are eradicated by the advances of modernity, she is left with no other option but to capitulate. Ira succumbs to prostitution as it becomes increasingly difficult to keep her child brother alive amidst the suffocating poverty that surrounds them. And in the end, he passes away. And as the story progresses, we find out that Ira has given birth to a kid with fair complexion. Clearly the child is born out of Ira's involvement in prostitution but it proves that Ira herself is not responsible for the lack of a male child in the family of her husband. But it is she who has to pay the price of being childless.

The Western model of development is responsible for the creation of poverty by causing damage to the natural environment, the local economy, and other self-sufficient survival systems. And now we are beginning to witness how the crumbling of the model is reflected in the subordination of women. The arrival of city workers in the rural community has resulted in the transformation of the village into a town. The terrain is undergoing radical transformation as a result of the industry. It has become desolate, arid, and uninhabitable for any form of life, including humans and animals. In light of this information, Kamala Platt's observation is able to provide light on the circumstances of Ira's forced involvement in prostitution. Kamala Platt believes that: "the move from a rural to an urban environment necessitated by environmentally destructive development, women are more likely than men to have to turn to prostitution as the only form of employment open to them. This presents another set of economic, legal, and health issues with which women must contend."[239] This demonstrates that women have increased difficulties in surviving in environments that have been altered as a result of modern forms of development. Degradation of the environment is unquestionably connected to a greater degree of difficulty for women than for men. Greta Gaard writes: "The racism and classism inherent in First World development strategies , built

[239] Kamala Platt, "Ecocritical Chicana Literature: Ana Castillo's Virtual Realism," in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, ed. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 141.

on one ethic for economic production at 'home' but another ethic for the Third World , have resulted in tremendous hardships for women, who are frequently the major providers of food, fuels and water in developing countries."[240]

Not just Ira, but also the other women who naively believe that working at the factory will bring a beneficial change to their situations have turned to prostitution. They experience a decline in their quality of life that is so severe that it seems impossible for them to recover. It has been demonstrated that the ecofeminist notion that the subordination of women and the subjection of nature spring from similar sources is correct. There is a significant relationship between the two, which, in order to find a solution, needs to be tackled simultaneously.

In *Fire on the Mountain* (2015) we have the central character of Nanda Kaul, the wife of the Vice-Principal of Punjab University. The life that she led at the house of her husband may look like the ideal life for a lady of an upper class: an abode of comforts, luxury and prosperity. But despite this, she felt like she was being held captive within the confines of her husband's house. Because she was the wife of a powerful figure in the community, she was expected to uphold the responsibilities that were assigned to her. These responsibilities had been carefully detailed for her to follow. There is an obvious undercurrent of dominance and exploitation. She vents her frustration on multiple occasions, describing how excruciating it has been to live her life under the watchful eye of her husband. The nature provides her with the solace and the quiet that she has been looking for but fails to discover in an affluent environment. And after the passing of her husband, she decides to remain in the bungalow in Kasauli that is known as Carignano. She looks for solace in the outdoors. She is at last liberated from the confines of patriarchy and is able to breathe freely amidst natural world. Even though she has been apprehensive about Raka's arrival in Carignano, it turns out well

[240] Greta Gaard, "Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature," in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animal, Nature* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 5.

for her when Raka gets there. Raka, the free spirit, instils in her the desire to go out and discover the natural world. She becomes more involved with nature and the changes that are taking place around her. Desai makes the point that patriarchy has its grip on all aspects of society, and it does so by pointing out that it is pervasive. The patriarchal force that rapes Nanda's friend are the same forces that are responsible for Nanda's imprisonment. She is also a remarkable character because she takes a position for herself and opposes the patriarchy. The same force that kills Nanda's friend or locks Nanda up also violates nature at the same time. Raka is the one who first notices the shifts in the natural world. Raka is the one who is most familiar with the indicators of environmental degradation because she is the one who most enjoys exploring nature and uncovering its hidden mysteries. This violation of the sanctity of nature, as well as the violation of the bodies and minds of women, is a direct result of the capitalist patriarchal system. There is a connection made possible by the fact that Nanda, her friend, and nature all have the same experience of being dominated and exploited.

Nanda has had her fair share of experiences in life where she has been repressed and held in subservience by her spouse. In her upper-class household, her independence means absolutely nothing. She has been only playing a part, a role of a perfect house wife, a mother, a care giver. The only thing holding her back from challenging her husband's authoritative role in their relationship is a lack of self-confidence. It is possible to get the impression that Raka lives a far more privileged life than her great-grandmother did. However, this is not the case; even the third generation has to shoulder the burden of patriarchy in our society. When she watches the party where the lunatics are showing off their pride, power, and position, it brings back memories of her father. Her father is also a powerful and wealthy man. She witnesses the same amount of heartlessness exhibited by her father. She and her mother have been victims of physical violence at the hands of the man, who exhibits no remorse for his actions:

> Somewhere behind them, behind it all, was her father, home from a party, stumbling and crashing through the curtains of night, his mouth opening to let out a flood of rotten stench, beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse- harsh , filthy abuse that made Raka cower under her bedclothes and wet the mattress in fright, feeling the stream of urine warm and weakening between her legs like a stream of blood, and her mother lay down on the floor and shut her eyes and wept.[241]

Raka is aware that the arrogance and superiority that come with authority are the root cause of the atrocities and severe violence that are perpetrated against those who are different, specifically women, the environment, and those on the margins of society. The outward appearance of civilization conceals a corrupt social order that maintains its power by subjugating not only women but also the natural world. Both of these facets are addressed in Desai's novel.

In Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* (2015) Maya is also a victim of patriarchy. She is portrayed as a woman who has experienced her father's extreme affection. Although her father's love may appear to be simple affection, it actually stems from a sense of ownership over his daughter. Because of this, he arranges for his daughter to marry a man he finds suitable. Goutama, Maya's husband is a seasoned attorney, is constantly engaged with work. Goutama does not possess Maya's jest for life or her love of the sensory realm. Maya and Goutama are incompatible with one another in terms of temperament. Maya has a great love for all things seductive and lovely. On the other hand, Goutama is a reserved individual. Their different names also allude to their differences. Maya represents the realm of senses. Goutama, on the other side, is the one who disapproves of any sensory appeal. Maya is instinctive and emotional, whereas he is practical and logical. Both these men in Maya's life fail to understand her. For them she is either an object of affection or of decoration. In both the cases she is rejected to have a voice of her own. She continually gets sucked into the enchanted world of nature. The peacock's cry eventually serves as an outlet for her pain. She

[241] Anita Desai, *Fire on the Mountain* (Haryana: Random House India, 2015), 79.

cries in anguish: "Am I gone insane? Father! Brother! Husband! Who is my saviour? I am in a need of one. I am dying, and I am in love and I am dying. God let mw sleep, forget rest. But no, I'll never sleep again. There is no rest anymore- only death and waiting."[242]

For Sita, in Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (2015) nature provides a sense of belonging. She doesn't feel a connection to Mumbai, where she now resides after her marriage to Raman. On the island of Manori, she hopes to give birth to her fifth child. She wants to free herself from patriarchal restrictions and provide a natural environment where her children can grow up in freedom. She has observed that youngsters raised in urban environments are more accepting of modern lifestyles. She particularly encourages her daughter Maneka to follow a path of spontaneity, creativity, and happiness. Maneka, whose views are deeply ingrained in the capitalist patriarchal ideology, is unable to understand Sita's perspective. Sita realises: "Maneka loathed her mother's proclivity for drama, for theatre, for emotion, with more bitterness than any other suffering relation of hers. Being her daughter, she felt most disgusted and hurt by it."[243] Maneka's rejection of her mother's perspective over modernity echoes in Raman's rejection of Sita's perspective over nature. There is a lack of compatibility between Sita and Raman. Raman's complete disregard of Sita's desires spring from his sense of superiority. She becomes bitter and defiant as a result of the absurdity of the relationship. She is expecting a child, but she has decided that she does not want to give birth to the child and instead wants to keep it safe within her womb. Because this is not conceivable in this world of logic and order, she makes the decision to flee into the enchanted realm of the dark and wild island, which existed in its entirety with all of its unadulterated authenticity.

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[242] Anita Desai, *Cry, the Peacock* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 2015), 86.

[243] Anita Desai, *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (New Delhi: Orient paperbacks, 2015), 112.

Nanda or Sita's husband, Raka's father or Maya's father and husband are representatives of a society that views women as the other, as something that must be controlled in order to keep authority over them. These males live in cities, have college degrees, and are regulars at social events like parties and gatherings. However, under the facade of good manners, these individuals are indeed monsters who consider it quite natural to control the women in their lives. These are the same men who have no shame in their quest to profit from nature as well. The women authors are the ones who unequivocally make the connection. Their female protagonists eventually rebel against the dominant culture by fleeing to the natural world, where they can be themselves without restriction. It is here that they realise that the power that has governed them is also at work here; it continues to dominate the other, which is nature. The connection between the two types of dominance has been demonstrated once more.

Within the framework of ecofeminism, the subject of gender is one of the primary concerns. They believe that the subordination of women and the control over nature both stem from the same source: patriarchal capitalism.[244] The plight of those women who speak out against injustice committed against minority groups demonstrates how tightly related and intertwined these two concepts are. Women who have an extraordinary ability to connect to nature and to the people whose lives depend on nature, as well as women who demonstrate a genuine care for the ills and injustices pushed down to poor people, constitute a threat to the system. The primary tool that the patriarchal capitalist system uses in order to tame these women and silence their voices is the physical force.[245] The rape of Ila Das is an illustration of how grossly patriarchal powers try to oppress those who pose a threat to them. The action in question occurs in the novel *Fire on the Mountain* written by Desai in the final chapter.

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[244] Catriona Sandilands, *The Good Natured Feminist: Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 76.

[245] Sandilands, *The Good Natured Feminist*, 20.

Preet Sing ambushes her as she walks away from Nanda's bungalow and continues on her way home. He first sexually assaults her and then kills her. Ila Das's initiatives towards destabilising a social system is largely controlled and dominated by men. She tried to halt child marriage and her endeavour to stop people from going to local priests for treatment. The brutal manner in which she meets her end at the end of the novel provides a lot of insight into the transformations that are taking place in the mountainous region. While on the one hand, we get to observe nature being brutally injured, on the other hand, we get to see how Ila Das perishes in a gruesome way. These two occurrences share something in common: capitalist patriarchy and its insatiable lust for power.

The violence that is used to control nature is the same violence that is inflicted upon women in order to oppress them. As a result, when Nanda describes her life with her extremely powerful husband or when Raka discusses her father, we realise that dominance can take on a variety of forms. The female characters in the novels are subjected to some form of subjugation at the hands of the male characters, while at the same time the male counterpart is the one who takes the primary initiative towards controlling nature. The subjugation of nature inevitably leads to the subjugation of women's voices and their freedom. Women, whether they live in the village or the city, are perceived to have developed strong connections to the natural world. As a result, concerns pertaining to gender are brought up in each of the novels whenever there is a clear emphasis placed on environmental concerns.

In the novel *The Coffer Dams* (2008) by Markandaya, a similar situation emerges when Helen, the wife of the chief engineer of a dam project, gets too involved with the people in the community. She begins to speak in favour of the indigenous group, and she begins to voice their worries. She feels sorry for the hardships that have been inflicted upon the locals as a result of the construction. As because her husband Clinton is oblivious to the

hardships endured by the people whose property he exploits for the construction of the dam, she emotionally distances herself from her husband. Clinton resorts to the same form of coercion that other male characters have resorted to: physical violence. In Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, Ira suffers a sexual assault, which leads to the birth of her son; in *Fire on the Mountain*, Ila Das suffers a sexual assault, which ultimately leads to her death; and in *The Coffer Dams*, Helen suffers a similar fate at the hands of her husband. Thus the brute force works against women irrespective of their social positioning, their levels of education and wealth. This shared experience of violence connects women coming from different social backgrounds.

As Helen becomes more involved with the local indigenous people, the connection she has with her husband begins to deteriorate. Her close relationships with residents of the area, particularly members of the indigenous tribes, are seen by Clinton as a betrayal of trust on her part. It is obvious that he is jealous, and his ego has been wounded. The other cultures, which he considers to be deficient in every way, are simply not comparable to the rigorous expectations of his own culture. But the thing that irritates him the most is the fact that he is unable to understand exactly why Helen is so interested in the lives of those who are economically disadvantaged. His pride of being in charge both racially and in his relationship with Helen has been hurt.

Nature’s exploitation and the exploitation of a woman’s body by the dominant males spring from the idea that both nature and women are resources. In Roy’s *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (2009) we witness the ordeal of a tribal girl who gets impregnated by a male member of the Brahmin class. The man's family subsequently rejects her and declines to offer her any assistance. Due to her involvement with a man outside of her group, she is even expelled from her own community. Concerns over women's enslavement, concerns regarding nature degradation and exploitation of marginal communities are all connected after all. All

of these seemingly unrelated problems are linked together by the corrupting influences of capitalism and patriarchy. Concerns pertaining gender alone cannot be handled or resolved in isolation. Women's freedom isn't going to amount to much unless each of these components of dominance within a patriarchal culture is addressed. This is an ecofeminist belief, and the significance of it has been re-established by the female authors. The conventional approach to environmental ethics has been blind to this relationship. Ariel Salleh offers her viewpoint in this regard. She feels that by going back to female lived experience in the present time of ecological crisis, ecofeminists are bringing new and radical understanding of these movements.[246] On the one hand, critics like Salleh and, on the other, women authors emphasise the need of addressing gender concerns within the peripheries of movements for environmental justice. The gender factor is addressed and analysed at greater length in ecofeminist philosophy than in any other movement for eco-justice. The female authors, in addition, investigate the relationship between the subjugation of nature and the exploitation of women, and as a result, we start to become aware of the fact that the two types of oppression are inseparable.

Ecofeminism and Class:

While *Fire on the Mountain* by Desai brings up some very serious themes about gender, another of her novels, *The Village by the Sea*, brings up questions regarding class. The settings of these two novels are similar; both are villages where modernity enters in the form of industries. One (*Fire on the Mountain*) takes place in a mountain community where the introduction of modernity in the form of a pharmaceutical business causes havoc in the lives of many residents. In the other (*The Village by the Sea*) we have a village named Thul along the sea shore. A similar predicament confronts this village as well. As soon as the first stones

[246] Ariel Salleh, "The Ecofeminism / Deep Ecology Debate: A Reply to Patriarchal reason," *Environmental Ethics* 14 no. 3 (1992): 195.

of a chemical factory are laid, the difficulties associated with modernity begin to manifest themselves. The only distinction is that the primary characters in the first book are predominantly upper-class ladies; in the second book, the protagonists are males and they belong to the working class. In addition, concerns relating to modernity as well as issues relating to gender are brought to our attention through these narratives. The protagonists of *The Village by the Sea* are working-class residents of the village. Because of things like the factory in the region and the inequalities produced in the social order, their lives are likewise turned upside down. Therefore, this is an example of another ecofeminist belief that is given expression here: that the struggle for class justice and the struggle for eco-justice are intertwined.[247] As said before, ecofeminism has placed a strong emphasis on the links that exist between social issues such as class, race, gender and environmental concerns. Desai has been effective in bringing those numerous links to our attention. These connections are manifold.

Those who are setting up the factory are the most powerful members of the group and stand head and shoulders over the others. The concept of the superior and the inferior is not just restricted to a comparison of the wealthy and the impoverished. Within any given social situation, there exist multiple tiers of power structures that are actively operating concurrently with one another. One of the features of class struggles that can take place within a community is the oppression of the lower classes by the relatively wealthier classes. Therefore, both the industrial class and the comparatively wealthy class in a community are exploiting the impoverished class. When we approach the subject of ecofeminism in the third world, this is a crucial point to keep in mind. Ecofeminism that addresses the issue of exploitation of nature and women by the implementers of modernity needs to take into

[247] Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive* (New Delhi: Rawat Publication, 2010), 9.

account the reality of class struggle within a society. It is a convoluted web consisting of a great number of power and dominance equations.

The problem of social class is discussed at this point in the book when a local man by the name of Biju acquires unanticipated fortune via the use of trickery and deceit. Biju is a very successful fisherman. People in the community believe that he became wealthy through the illegal transportation of commodities over the sea through his boat. And at this very moment, he is in the process of constructing a new boat, which is something that the citizens of this town have never seen before: a boat that is equipped with all of the latest conveniences and is powered by diesel. Acquiring money makes one feel superior from the rest. One shining illustration of this is Biju. As soon as he begins to acquire wealth and adopt somewhat modern practices, he is acutely aware of his elevated status in comparison to the other villagers. The city provides the labourers that he employs. He does not intend to hire any of the local people who are in severe need of employment. Therefore, it is not just the presence of the factory that is responsible for the destruction of the local resources that are necessary for survival; in addition, the local wealthy people are the ones who are making life difficult for the villagers.

The next case that Desai offers that once again brings up the topic of social class. It is when the people from the city, the de Selvas, come to live in the hamlet. They have come to spend some time in the great outdoors, specifically by the sea. They act in a peculiar manner toward the natives. They have been in this location on previous occasions as well. Even after all the years that they have spent coming to the village, the villagers and the people who work for them still seem weird and unfamiliar to them. They maintain a distance and an air of indifference toward the locals. These locals are little more than servants to them; they have no other significance. Hari and his sisters start to look after these people from the cities. This is an opportunity to earn something, however meagre that something may be, specially when

times are tough. Hari is given the task of procuring fresh fish and other food products from the local market along with eggs. Hari had worked for them in the past, but the owners of Mon Repos act as if it's the first time they've ever seen him. They pay little attention to the plight of the poor. They don't even make an effort to recall the faces of the people who are consistently going out of their way to ensure that their stay is pleasant and memorable for them. Hari is aware of the disconnect, but he offers a relatively innocuous justification for their odd behaviour despite the fact that he is aware of it: "City people had poor memories, Hari thought, or perhaps they saw so many hundreds of faces in the streets every day that they could not tell one from the other."[248]

Hari believes that going to the city, despite its otherworldly appearance and the strangeness of its inhabitants, is the only way for him to pull himself and his life out of the crisis that he is currently experiencing. Desai's explanation of his willingness to go to the city prompts her to bring up a number of concerns and questions regarding gender and social class. Hari is under the impression that even if he remains in Thul and continues to work in the factory, he will never be able to earn sufficient money to arrange marriages for his sisters with wealthy suitors. He is required to hand down dowry in the form of "silk saris and gold jewellery," "a bicycle or a scooter," "a cow or a buffalo," and "a piece of land" in order to get marriage partners for his sisters. The list might go on forever. The experience of the outside world destroys Hari's idyllic vision of working at a manufacturing plant. He urgently needs to increase his income. Therefore, because the culture that oppresses women normalises the notions that marriage is the only option for them or hinders women's ability to have a voice of their own, men like Hari are forced to relocate to a city. In these and other ways, patriarchy contributes to the maintenance of the contemporary capitalist order. The lives of poor individuals are imprisoned within these webs established by patriarchy and capitalism: "He

[248] Anita Desai, *The Village by the Sea* (New Delhi: Penguin Random House, 1982), 51.

must have a job if he was to find his sisters a way out of this dark, gloomy house and the illness and drunkenness and hopelessness that surrounded them like the shadows of the night."[249]

Ecofeminism and Race:

In her novel, *The Coffer Dams* (2008), Markandaya addresses the topic of racial inequality in a serious and elaborate manner. The story takes place in post independence India. It is now a free and independent nation. However, the repercussions of the two hundred years of colonial history are still very much present in the hearts of the people and in the way society is being shaped. Markandaya in the novel sheds light on the connection between colonial experiences and environmental racism. Kamala Platt in her essay *Ecocritical Chicana Literature : Ana Castillo's "Virtual realism"* writes: "Tracking the course of environmental racism often exposes scars of past colonial encounters and thus underscores the interconnection of environmental racism and colonialism."[250]

The village in *The Coffer Dams* is about to get a dam thanks to the arrival of the white folks. Following that, Clinton, the head engineer, and his wife Helen arrived. The construction of the dam is significant to Clinton because it provides him with a feeling of purpose and a sense of power. He is content to simply build it, with the goal of achieving the remarkable feat of creating a cutting-edge marvel in a backward location such as an Indian village. The racial issue, as we see it, is shown by his total lack of concern for the lives of the economically disadvantaged individuals whose well-being would be negatively impacted. It is believed that the construction of the dam would be beneficial to some people while at the

[249] Desai, *The Village by the Sea*, 67.

[250] Kamala Platt, "Ecocritical Chicana Literature: Ana Castillo's "Virtual Realism," in *Ecofeminist Litarary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, ed. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 144.

same time causing the displacement of other people, uprooting residents, and harming the environment. Clinton, on the other hand, is happily unaware of the serious repercussions the dam would have on nature and in the lives of the people. Not only is Clinton uninterested in the needs of the people, he is also uninterested in the requirements of his own labour force, which consists of Indian labourers who have come to work for him. He is unaware of the location from where they originate or the destination to which they travel after work. He is just concerned with one thing, and that is making sure that they are working according to the work schedules. It is possible to infer that Clinton has absolutely no interest in the people who lived in the area from this line: "They all looked the same to him."[251] This stems from his perception of his own racial superiority to that of the Indians.

This sense of racial supremacy shapes their relationship with the natives and colours their perceptions of indigenous cultures. Mackendrick, who is associated with Clinton, also voices his contempt for the Indians in the following way: "My God, Indians! Mackendrick exclaimed in bitter despair."[252] Not only he feels disdain toward the people and the labourers, but also toward the engineers who are working alongside them on the construction site of the dam. The Indian experts have been working on the project for a considerable amount of time. They have made plans for the houses and cottages that will be located around the construction site. These are the exclusive domains of the white masters. The planning conceived by the native engineers is criticised by the white people, despite the fact that the sites are created with the climate and the comforts of the foreigners in mind. In contrast, the white people's constructions are lauded for their attractiveness and level of sophistication due to the fact that they are built by white people. Because of the prejudice that is so deeply ingrained in their mentality, they are unable to accurately assess the situation. The problem of

[251] Kamala Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams* (Navi Mumbai: Penguin Random House, 2008), 6.

[252] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 8.

man's dominance over nature is intricately connected to the problem of racial discrimination. The European Enlightenment, which asserted that man is superior to nature, is also to blame for elevating a group of people to a higher status than others, the Western world above the Eastern world. The people who are working towards erecting a dam over a free flowing river think that this is development as it involves conquering the nature. These are the same people who disregard other culture as inferior and other people as savage and ignorant. The subject of race is an ecofeminist concern, and time and time again the female authors have investigated the numerous nuances of the race issue in their work.

Markandaya concentrated her attention on the racial tension that would arise from the construction of a dam in the southern region of India right from the start of the novel. The Western architects are under the impression that they are the only ones who are familiar with the necessary construction technologies. They have on their team a number of engineers from the area, in addition to members of the local indigenous community. However, both these natives and their expertise are continually criticised by the white folks. What the white masters utterly neglect is the reality that in order to construct a dam in a foreign area, one needs to have knowledge of both the terrain and the climate of that land. The local engineers have a more in-depth familiarity with the terrain. The knowledge and experience of the natives are utterly disregarded. As a result of the Enlightenment period, there has been a shift away from the value placed on traditional knowledge and toward the recognition of the superiority of contemporary knowledge.[253] The Enlightenment period creates the groundwork for modernity. Clinton, Mackendrick, Rowling, and many of their allies make frequent allusions to the 'inefficiency' of the Indian employees, the 'uselessness' of their age-old wisdom, and the 'falsity' of the pride that comes with being Indian. The point made by

[253] Erika Cudworth, *Developing Ecofeminist Theory: The Complexity of Difference* (UK: University of East London, 2005), 140.

Vandana Shiva that the refusal to accept other branches of knowledge (local or indigenous) has a direct link in the increasing levels of poverty in the Third World is quite insightful. She writes: "Poverty, as the denial of the basic needs, is not necessarily associated with the existence of traditional technologies, and its removal is not necessarily an outcome of the growth of modern ones. On the contrary the destruction of ecologically sound traditional technologies along with the destruction of their material base is generally believed to be responsible for poverty in societies."[254]

Their disrespect and abhorrence for all things Indian are displayed in the cruellest and most heartless way that is conceivable. There is an apparent power struggle going on between the two leaders of the team, one named Clinton and the other named Krishnan, the local engineer. The ideas of Krishnan are consistently ignored, his contributions are disregarded, and his knowledge is pushed into the background. There was absolutely no possibility that the whites would ever allow themselves to be led by an Indian. The indigenous people who work the land are caught in the middle of the disagreement that develops between Clinton and Krishnan. These communities are led by Krishnan, not Clinton, as their own leader. Clinton's desire to have complete control over the project and the people working on it is something that Krishnan is aware of. In this brief exchange, Krishnan is able to demonstrate that Clinton and he are not competing against one another but rather collaborating on the achievement of the same objective. However, the friction that exists between them cannot be denied, and it is a direct result of Clinton's racial superiority complex. Because of his feeling of pride, he finds it difficult to embrace Krishnan and the influence that he has over the local indigenous people. In Anuradha Roy's *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (2009) a similar race issue has been dealt with. Amulya observes that the white masters of the mining industry in the village of Songarh look down upon the village workers. When his wife Kananbala wants

[254] Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2004), 12.

to visit her white neighbour's house Amulya forbids her to go there saying: "No need. What an idea! Have you forgotten they're British? To them we're no more than uncouth jungles."[255]

Markandaya and Roy recognise the complexity of the race problem. Markandaya further explores it through the character of Bashiam who is a worker from an indigenous group. While people like Krishnan are looked down upon by the white masters, marginal workers like Bashiam are looked down upon by people like Krishnan because they are considered to be of a lower social class. This man is called by the locals as a "Jungly wallah": "A primitive just come down off the trees. Englishman and Hindu alike looked down their fine Aryan noses and covertly spurned the aborigine."[256]

There is such a strong connection between concerns of social class and racial discrimination that it is impossible to discuss either topic independently of the other. For ecofeminist critics patriarchal capitalism is the source of all sorts of oppression. We begin to understand that Clinton's sense of pride is the driving force behind his exploitation of the land, his control of Helen, and his complete and utter disregard for the local tribes. Clinton takes pride in his status as a man, and in his status as a white man from the West. This is the reason why there is a blurring of the line between class issue and race issue in the novels written by Markandaya. It takes place when the various types of people at the work site begin to organise themselves into groups. The once-small village, which has now grown into a town, starts to develop colonies among its native population. It is vital for them to organise themselves into colonies in order to prevent them from bonding together to oppose the power that exploits them. The only way that Clinton and his men will be able to carry out their plan to undermine the power of the labourers is if they first succeed in driving a wedge between

[255] Anuradha Roy, *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (India: Picador India, 2009), 16.

[256] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 19.

the labourers themselves. Fear is a required component in order to maintain power over them, and divisions are important to produce fear. On the other hand, these groups are extremely loyal to the classes to which they belong: groups of individuals who are similar to one another, such as the officers, the wives, the technicians, the cadres, and so on. However, another group comes into being, and that is the group of native, indigenous labourers. They are seen as ‘the other’ by those who are white as well as by those who belong to higher Indian social class. When confronted with the 'other' as an inferior entity or a threat, all other groups tend to come together.

Markandaya exposes in her work what is going on in the minds of those who hold the belief that they are superior to others. When it comes to whites, it refers to racial pride, whereas when it comes to natives, it refers to class pride. Markandaya any attempt to generalise. Because of this, she imagines Helen to be a white woman who nevertheless has a strong affinity with the indigenous people. On the other hand, the character of Lefevre, a white technician, is shown as someone who is profoundly distressed by the oppressive practises that white people have implemented. He extends his hand to Krishnan in a gesture of camaraderie. However, Krishnan, who is aware of what white supremacy entails, is unable to accept the hand without having some degree of scepticism.

The conversation that takes place between Helen and her friend Mille opens up opportunity to investigate the racial and social dynamics of the situation in further depth. Although they are married to different officers, these two women have a lot in common with one another, despite the fact that they are very different people. Helen is irritated by Mille's incessant insistence on attending the social functions held by the white wives. Helen has the goal of distancing herself from the empty rituals that are practised in the community. Mille, though, attends the gatherings; the never-ending chitchat provides an escape from reality for her. They strive to maintain their social standing, clinging to the idea that they are more

superior than others and the conviction that what they do is just and reasonable. The instant they step outside of the confines of their self-imposed morality, they are granted the opportunity to glimpse the truth, which is something that Helen is aware of but Mille is not. Mille, much like the other women of the white class, is afraid of the reality that the idea of superiority that they hold so dear is empty and can crumble at the slightest touch of the truth. This is something that Mille and the other women of the white class share in common.

The delicate issue of race causes tensions between the Indian engineer Krishnan and the wife of the main architect Clinton. Krishnan belongs to the native community, yet he fails to connect with the local indigenous community and their plight. These people are forced to leave their ancestral land because of the construction of the dam. Krishnan being an inhabitant of the same locality does not possess the compassion to understand the situation of the tribal people. It should not come as a surprise that Krishnan, much like the white superiors, does not share a close bond with them. On the other hand, Helen, the white woman, is able to demonstrate a rare sensibility that connects her with the afflicted, the members of the local tribe who are being negatively impacted by the development project. Krishnan, the Indian engineer who works with the English people and who is aware of the underlying power politics that create the black-white binaries, is unable to overcome his mental barrier that projects him as superior over the indigenous tribes. When Krishnan's ideas and opinions are overlooked or dismissed just because he is from a developing country, he experiences excruciating mental anguish. The similar mentality may be noticed in his behaviour when he interacts with the natives in the area. His complete lack of compassion for those who have been uprooted demonstrates how firmly ingrained his concept of class superiority is in his psyche: “Krishnan knew of the existence of the tribal settlement, but had

never ventured into one, knew the oddity he would have been in the tribesmen's eyes if he had."[257]

The peculiarity of the class issue arises from the attitude of Krishnan like men towards the people like Bashiam. The tribes have historically been located on the periphery of society. Because of this, any type of communication coming from Krishnan is going to appear quite strange to everyone. Markandaya brings up the complicated racial problem that arises at the dam site in the event of a natural disaster in order to draw attention to it once more. This problem involves the indigenous people, the locals, and the whites. In the same location, there are two events that are very similar to one another. The first incident results in the loss of the lives of white men, and it is the assistance of the native people that makes it possible to recover the bodies of the deceased and perform their last rites. Without their assistance, neither of these things would have been possible. The second incident of this kind results in the loss of the lives of members of the local tribe who have been working on the construction of the dam. This time around, the difficulty is that the authorities do not understand how important it is to retrieve the remains of the deceased and to perform the appropriate ceremonies for them. Clinton who was requested by Helen to carry out the recovery of the bodies refuses to do so as the work could damage the construction. He continues by stating that the people's predetermined destinies are to be blamed for the incident that has taken place. The reaction of the Indian engineers who work alongside white engineers on the construction of the project is even more shocking. They, like everyone else, display an utter lack of an emotional response to the horrific incident that has taken place. These engineers and labourers who deal with whites are aware of the fact that the white pride is continually undermining their efforts; even the dam is being created under the names of Clinton and Mackendrick. However, the truth of the matter is that the Indian engineers are as

[257] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 40.

harsh and insensitive, and at times they are even antagonistic to the impoverished tribal community. In a nation like India, with its rigid social structure, we are aware that the subject of race is a complex one, and this is something that we must take into consideration. Krishnan's scepticism about Helen's growing interest in the lives of the poor remains as another example of how he perceives the tribes. Not only does he have a poor idea of the tribes his sense of superiority determines his reaction against Helen's involvement. He questions Helen's credibility of being close to the tribes: "He even despised Helen for thinking that he, as educated, more civilised than she was, could be familiar with any aspect of the half-savage hill people's lives."[258]

Her confusion is sparked by Krishnan's response, and as a result, she investigates its cause. What becomes clear is that she is coming to terms with the actual power dynamics in the relationship. It is never a straight forward equation between one who rules and one who is being ruled. There lay intertwined problems relating to gender, race, class issues. In particular situations, they change positions. Helen is starting to understand this. In addition, the racial element is pushed to the forefront when we observe two white masters discussing the locals, who are the labourers. Any sympathy shown by members of the higher class for the natives or the locals is regarded as a sign of weakness and is therefore frowned upon. These masters are hardened warriors who believe that the gestures of love and compassion should be avoided at all costs if they wish to preserve and enhance their reputations as powerful figures in the community. Mackendrick's attitude toward the locals is one of sympathy, yet he rarely speaks his mind when he's with his friends. What he does instead is make an effort to steer clear of circumstances and remarks that are derogatory toward the natives. In chapter 9 of the book, he abruptly cuts off a conversation that he is having with Rowling when he gets the

[258] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 40.

impression that Rowling is becoming excessively sceptical about the effectiveness of the local labourers and the local management.

Rowling on the other hand remains critical about the locals. His comments about the "Bengali babus" here is another example of the racist attitude of the whites. "Bengali babus" is a class of people who used to do the office works for the British. Rowling compares the local labourers with this class of people who were good in office work. The point in comparison is that the labourers would be very bad in handling the machines as they only think of in terms of bookish knowledge rather that real practical knowledge. Mackendrick understands the illogicality of the statement and says: "I wouldn't call them Bengali babus . They are not from Bengal anyway, and the babus are clerks down at base."[259] Rowling's attitude is shared by Clinton. Clinton too thinks that any emotional involvement with the locals is a sign of weakness: "Like Rowling he had no patience foe amiable weaklings, and the wider arc of his vision swinging beyond the encompassing hills saw no place for them in the power game that the world was playing. Strength: one spoke only from strength."[260]

The revealing of these personalities and their various attitudes toward those who are seen to be lower on the social hierarchy is vital to our comprehension of how the power structure contributes to the formation of the hierarchy in terms of race. The location of Krishnan within the matrix of this structure is what makes it more fascinating to consider. Krishnan is cultivating his own conception of power, in which he sees himself as more capable than the other people in the community. His outlook is comparable to that of Clinton. He starts to believe that being sensible handicap one's race. He believes: "...there was no game under the sun that two could not learn to play. He brooded, his dark unlined face like a

[259] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 48.

[260] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 48.

carved god's, while his subtle brahminical mind delicately, picked up and dissected the western technique of seduction and coercion."[261]

Clinton's attitude towards the local labourers is equally disrespectful, if not more. As he is not very concerned about their requirements, he has no problem with terminating their employment in addition to cutting off their pay if they refuse to comply with Clinton's directives. When Mackendrick reminds him about the labour union, Clinton makes remarks that suggest he is arrogant and full of white pride: "'Their writ doesn't run here', Clinton said comfortably, ' in practice. We could sack the entire coolie labour force overnight and have a queue a mile long by morning if we wanted and they know it. Organized casual labour- it's almost a contradiction in terms.'"[262]

Though Mackendrick doesn't comply to the views of Clinton regarding the locals, he never speaks out against the former president. But he insists on harping on the point that as long as the labour union is around, it will not be simple to mistreat them anymore. He says this at every opportunity. On the other hand, Clinton is unaffected. He does not care to hear what he has to say. He is aware of how the race and class structures in the society work. He has no concern for opposition from the Indian worker community because he belongs to the superior white elite. The labourers go on strike as a result of the conflict.

Also featured in Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* is the unabashed display of an individual's inflated sense of self. In the southern region of India, the white masters have arrived to begin construction of a dam over a river. The lives of the impoverished population of the country are immediately and continuously upended by their arrival. These needy folks are members of the indigenous group in the area. To begin, their lands are unlawfully

[261] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 51.

[262] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 51.

appropriated from them in order to make room for the construction of their bungalows. To place the blame solely on the white people would be wrong given that the Indians, who are of a higher social level, are the ones who are driving the tribal people away from the land that is rightfully theirs. What is surprising that except Helen none of the women of the white community expresses concern over the dislocation of the tribal people from their land. The women of the white community spend the majority of their time participating in their festivities, which display their sense of racial superiority. These contemporary men and women are totally immersed in the enchanted lives of comfort and luxury that they have created for themselves. The ignorance, arrogance, and sense of superiority that are reflected in these powerful people's perceptions of the locals can be seen in the following lines:

> 'Just when the fun's beginning', Mille would say, pouting, lugubrious, manner belying her age, the drag and dissatisfactions of her colonial years pulling down the corners of her mouth. Or, her face suddenly naked in its wanting, 'They won't even let you get drunk in this bloody country. Damn them. Damn them.' Inveighing against them, the veins in her neck thick and gobbling, for she felt about it passionately.[263]

The remark is made not out of a moment's frustration. These white people truly believe in their heart's heart that this country is no match for their superior race.

The issue, however, is that they can no longer entirely disregard what the locals are thinking or feeling. This presents a difficulty for them. The moment for transformation has finally arrived. It is a precarious time for the white people as colonial dominance over countries around the world is collapsing. White people can no longer relax in their comfortable positions. Clinton is preoccupied with his work when Mille becomes aware of the current situation and realises that they only have a short amount of time left in the country. Mille has made the decision to turn her attention away from the truth. But the truth of their diminishing splendour is already there, waiting in the shadows of their hearts. That is why Markandaya writes: "She saw the lovely lights, and averted her eyes from the intense

[263] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 54.

blackness they created beyond the illuminated."[264] The dazzling light of colonial authority generates a profound darkness that is impermeable to any light and cannot be illuminated by any effort. This gloom creeps across the empire little by little. Mackendrick is the only one who is aware of the darkness drawing closer, but he never discusses it directly: "The real point he did not state, which was that the days of ostentation were over- gone with their proponents the British, and their lesser copies the maharajas. It was the day of the common man, and the common man was done with flummery."[265]

Markandaya has addressed the problem of race and class from a variety of vantage points throughout her work. There occurs an event that shows the expertise of Bashiam as a technician. It is essential to establish the character as efficient in order to highlight the value that these people possess even inside a capitalist society. It is about a crane that fails to function properly at the construction site as a result of careless handling of the machine. This causes frustration for Howard Clinton, so he starts looking for the appropriate kind of person who can fix the equipment. It turns out that Bashiam is the person Clinton has been looking for. Bashiam has been tasked with the responsibility of fixing the crane and getting it back into working order. This bothers many people. It is their pride that keeps them from seeing the truth, which is that even a man from one of the tribal communities can be just as effective as the white overlords. His ability to repair the machine makes Clinton even to say that, "He is the best man for the job we have."[266] The accomplishment of the task at hand is Clinton's sole preoccupation at the moment. He does not consider anything or anyone else in the world. Because of this, when the bodies of his workers become trapped beneath the concrete, he does not desire for a funeral to be performed for them. This event not only turns out to be dangerous to people's lives but also inspires terror in the minds of the white overlords. There

[264] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 60.

[265] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 60.

[266] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 94.

is an uneasy feeling that permeates everywhere, but Clinton's pride does not shrink in the face of this unease. Helen is opposed to the idea of continuing with the construction work, but Clinton is adamant about doing so. Even though Mackendrick is not entirely in agreement with Helen, it is impossible for him to be as adamant as Clinton. Helen is confused, so he begins to explain to her why there is no way to travel back in time. Helen places a higher value on the life of an individual than on the completion of the dam. She comes up empty-handed in her search for a justification for the sacrifice of human life on the altar of modernity. But according to Clinton, this sensitivity is nothing more than an indication of a person's weakness: "'The weaker ones,' said Clinton, 'get shaken out, and that is all. It is a normal process.' 'It is inhuman,' said Helen. 'Are you,' said Clinton, 'trying to teach me my business?'"[267]

This brings up an interesting point. Somewhere in the middle of Clinton's chat with Helen, his feelings of racial pride and his feelings of pride in being a man meet. It irritates him that his wife is trying to persuade him not to build the dam that they have been planning on constructing for a long time. Both racial and gendered issues are intertwined, which demonstrates that a mentality that makes men insensitive to "the other" is the root cause of the horrors that have been committed against women and people of less developed races. The heightened ambition, unwavering white pride, and unyielding ego of the white master—the standard bearer of modernity—make it impossible for them to comprehend the reality of the situation. In the hands of those who seek to exploit nature, the machines have been transformed into lethal weapons. They want to rule the rivers, but they forget that the rivers are more powerful than any of us together. We do not possess ownership of nature; rather, nature possesses ownership of us. The man's pride causes him to become insensitive toward those who are less fortunate; it makes him insensitive to the 'other.' Helen, on the other hand,

[267] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 128.

is able to recognise that the blindness brought on by snobbery and insensitivity was harmful to both human and non-human nature. Her spouse finds it annoying that she is so involved in the community. He is unable to comprehend the breadth of her compassion, which is perpetually stirred by the suffering of others. This component, which places emphasis on the gender issue, brings together issues of race and gender. Helen's desires are completely irrelevant to Clinton. It is obvious right from the start that Helen and Clinton are two very different people, each with their own unique temperament.

The problems of racial inequality and gender disparity are intricately interwoven.[268] Women's subjugation at the hands of men can be found within a population that prides itself on being superior to other racial groups and maintains its dominance over those groups. This is something that is made clear to us right away when we start reading the story. For instance we witness Clinton's displeasure with Helen's interaction with the locals. He openly disapproves of this behaviour, and on occasion he instructs Helen to desist from engaging in such activities. Helen's interests and her concerns are of no significance to him, and in chapter 21, we see Clinton acting irrationally and sexually abusing her. This event is significant because Clinton's violation of nature and his violation of Helen's body are connected. Both of these violations originate out of Clinton's pride in being superior in gender and in race. There is a direct response to that within ecofeminism. Ecofeminist belief is that the root of oppression, be it in terms of race or gender, rests in a mentality that views nature as something that can be governed by force.[269] Therefore, we are able to observe that every marginal element is entangled within this intricate web of power and oppression that exists in society. We have come to realise the truth that lies behind the ecofeminist notion that the emancipation of women is not solely dependent on women and their independence;

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[268] Erika Cudworth, *Developing Ecofeminist Theory: The Complexity of Difference* (UK: University of East London, 2005), 43.

[269] *Ecofeminism: Women Culture Nature*, ed. Carolyn Merchant (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indianan University Press, 1997).

rather, the stranglehold that male capitalist power has on every 'other' needs to be shattered.[270] The president begins to exercise his authority over his wife. Helen's uniqueness, as well as her capacity to think independently and compassionately, are not taken into account by or respected by him. The sexual abuse of Helen is the manifestation of his pride and ego, and he sees her as something to possess and to control by using force. And because she is his wife, he considers this act of violence to be completely acceptable and justified: "She is mine, he said, stubbornly; why should I let her go? What I have I hold. But knew this to be an illusion, having touched the emptiness where she had fled him, so that the bolsters began to sag under the weight of knowledge."[271]

Clinton, after justifying the violent crime he commits, also feels that even though he has control over his wife's body, he is unable to exert any influence over her spirit. She has moved away from the comfortable environment a long time ago after a rift in their emotional connection becomes apparent. Markandaya explains that Clinton is looking for a scapegoat in some sense to vent his anger because he is aware that his efforts to build the dam have been a dismal failure. No matter how adamantly he denies the reality of the situation, he is not ignorant of the facts. The harmful effects of his oppressive behaviour, in terms of race and gender, manifest in ways that are both physically and psychologically damaging. The ecofeminist movement is concerned with the emancipation of all marginal beings: women, nature, and people who depend on nature. We have come to the realisation that the much acclaimed modernity has a very glossy exterior, but that behind it lurks the lustful beast, which is the masculine capitalist monster that controls others and asserts its dominance over rest via force. The same white pride that dictates the behaviour of others also controls the behaviour of its own women. In either scenario, the mentality is exactly the same.

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[270] Candice Bradley, "Keeping the Soil in Good Heart: Women Weeders, the Environment, and Ecofeminism" in *Ecofeminism: Women Culture Nature*, ed. Carolyn Merchant (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indianan University Press, 1997), 290.

[271] Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 130.

Conclusion:

When it comes to the disposal of industrial waste, it is essential to keep in mind that marginal, tribal communities will invariably suffer damage.[272] We receive a picture of the toxic waste disposal that takes place in the lower areas of the hill in the novel *Fire on the Mountain* by Anita Desai. The local populace tends to be on the lower socioeconomic scale in these areas. Their waterways and lands are polluted by the hazardous components of the garbage, which is a problem for them. Both Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* and Desai's *The Village by the Sea* depict a similar scenario involving the hazardous disposal of chemicals in their respective settings. The writers of these two books make it very evident that waste is disposed of in regions that are in close proximity to economically disadvantaged individuals in the region in both of their works. The rivers and the land are both poisoned, but the poor are the ones who are suffering the most as a result of the hazardous waste disposal. When the indigenous people in Markandaya's novel *The Coffer Dams* are forced off their lands and relocated to lower locations by the side of the river, we see a situation very similar to the previously mentioned novels. The debris from the construction project is thrown into the river, where it is carried downstream by the river. Then, the wastes have an impact on the lands and rivers and on the people who have been relocated there without their will. One issue that is brought to light is the fact that the politics of power are being played out in the situation of trash disposal. This Benjamim F.Chavis calls "Environmental Racism". He points out that: **"**Environmental racism is a racial discrimination in environmental policy making. It is racial discrimination in the enforcement of regulations and laws. It is racial discrimination in the deliberate targeting of communities of colour."[273]

[272] Dorceta E. Taylor, "Women of Color, Environmental Justice, and Ecofeminism", in *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 38.

[273]Benjamin F.Jr Chavis, "Forward," in *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots*, ed. Robert D. Bullard (Boston: South End Press, 1993), 3.

In India the marginal communities are most adversely affected by the policies. Environmental injustice is not gender neutral either. The lives of individuals in third world nations are impacted in a variety of different ways by the development programmes that are carried out there. And oftentimes, the trials that women endure are distinct to those that men go through. It has been observed that when cash cropping is utilised instead of natural agriculture, the likelihood of women profiting from their labour is reduced. We are aware that a woman's sense of agency increases when she has access to nature and when there is natural diversity. It allows her to exercise control not just over her own life but also over the lives of her children. When she is deprived of this access as a result of industrialization, she experiences a significant degree of suffering. We have seen awful disasters occur in the lives of women who have lost their access to natural resources in order to accommodate modernization.

Ecofeminism contests all existing hierarchies and power structures. Its purpose is not only to alter the individuals who have power; rather, it seeks to alter the system by which power is exercised. Val Plumwood writes,"It is not a masculine identity pure and simple, but the multiple, complex cultural identity of the master formed in the context of class, race, species and gender domination which is at issue."[274] Thus recognising the intersectionality of gender, class, colonialism, and race is fundamental to the movement for environmental justice.[275]

[274] Val Plumwood. *Feminism and the Master of Nature* (London: Routhledge , 1993), 5.

[275] Kamala Platt. "Ecocritical Chicana Literature: Ana Castillo's Virtual Realism" in *Ecofeminist Litarary acriticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy* , ed. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (University of Illinois Press: Chicago. 1998), 144.

CHAPTER FIVE

Other Marginal Voices: the Animal and the Indigenous

"The desire to differentiate-and alienate and subjugate-other-ness is one of the greatest sins of our species, and for me personally, one of the most effective motivations for relentless activism to push for change."[276]

Introduction:

The primary contribution that ecofeminist theory makes is a critique of the ontology of dominance. Within this particular realm of dominance, those who exercise dominance are regarded as superior, while those who are controlled are regarded as inferior. In this dynamic of dominant power, inferior individuals are frequently relegated to the position of objects that can be utilised for the benefit of the powerful. This serves to further the interest of the powerful people. Within the framework of the man-animal duality, animals are seen as a source of meat or skin that man may make use of. One of the most important topics of debate and discussion among ecofeminists is the concern for animal issues and the rights of animals.[277] Josephine Donovan makes reference to the writings of Carol Adams, who is an influential ecofeminist thinker. Donovan is curious about the structural explanation that Carol Adams has provided for the cultural discourse known as "meat-animal." Donovan writes: "Meat –eating is a test in which "meat" is the signifier and "animal" is the absent referent.

[276]Miyun Park, "Fighting Other," in *Sister Species: Women, Animal and Social Justice,* ed. Lisa Kemmerer and Carol J. Adams (Chicago: Illinois University Press), 79.

[277] Pattrice Jones, "Fighting Cocks: Ecofeminism Versus Sexualized Violence," in *Sister Species: Women, Animal and Social Justice,* ed. Lisa Kemmerer (USA: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

The animal is absent from the test; its being as a thou is elided and dominated by the signifier meat, which deadens the animal's aliveness, turning her or him into an it."[278]

The operation of a capitalist society seems like the transformation of one living being into a non-living product. The animal is turned into a commodity by society for the sake of market exchanges.[279] The primary reason ecofeminism has been so critical of modernity is that modernity has attempted to universalize and thereby unite the earth on the basis of one world governing system. The goal of modernity is to wipe out as many underrepresented communities and groups as possible, and it uses scientific evidence to legitimise this objective. Within the dichotomy of man and animal, the term 'animal' functions as a marginalising other. As a result, the term 'flesh' has developed into a more generic signifier of 'animal' or the 'idea animal'. This is one method for giving legitimacy to the business of buying and selling animals. Ecofeminists have demonstrated that the problem of animals is tied to the problems of both the environment and women.[280] The non-human nature includes animals, and as a result, the problem of environmental justice needs to include the perspective of animal rights. And in power dynamics dominated by men, women and animals are both relegated to the position of subordinate other to the dominating male. Therefore, both have a connection that may be understood in terms of being exploited by the same malevolent power.[281]

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[278] Josephine Donovan, "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Reading the Orange," in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, ed. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (Chicago: Illinois University Press), 75.

[279] Carol J. Adams, *Neither Man nor Beast: Feminism and the Defence of Animals* (UK: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc,2018).

[280] Lisa Kemmerer, *Sister Species: Women, Animal and Social Justice* (USA: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 10.

[281] Ronnie Zoe Hawkins, "Ecofeminism and Nonhumans: Continuity, Difference, Dualism, and Domination," *Hypatia* 13, no. 1 (Winter, 1998) : 19, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810611

The socially constructed categories of ‘woman’ and ‘animal’ are comparable in the sense that both are regarded as the subordinate counterpart in dualisms that pit man against woman or man against animal. They both serve the symbolic functions of being useful for the patriarchal system. Examining these linkages, which are held in common by women and animals, within the context of ecofeminism would result in a less damaging reconstruction of cognition and action. It is necessary for us to keep in mind that the linkages are not 'natural,' and one cannot be essentialist about this. Both are viewed as having inferior attributes because of how they are framed by culture, which places them in the same category as one another. There are several different threads of socially produced narratives that can be used to locate the fabrication.[282] Such narratives are created, as Donna Haraway suggests, by white men and the purpose is to justify the oppression of women and animals. Lori Gruen presents four such frameworks where men have proved that their domination over animals and women is necessary for the survival of the human race.[283] These narratives are called by Haraway as “original stories”.[284] First is the story that suggests that hunting behaviour in male hominids results in an evolutionary shift. Haraway describes this as the “Myth of Man the Hunter”[285]. According to the story, the hunter’s instinct towards violence, destruction and competition directs him towards the killing of animals and that is how the dualism of culture-nature arises. From here man’s superiority over the non-human nature is also firmly established. Critics like Gruen and Haraway point to the falsehood of such theories by saying that such myths are created by Western minds in the mid-twentieth century. It results from the political hostilities of post-World War II. Such a thought has defined man’s aggression as biologically

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[282] Donna Haraway,*Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1985),p-5.

[283] Lori Gruen, “Dismantling Oppression: An Analysis of the Connection between Women and Nature,” in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animal, Nature*, ed. Greta Gaard (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 61.

[284] Donna Haraway,*Primate Visions*, 5.

[285]Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions*, 5.

determined and that is why ‘natural’. This serves as the foundation of culture. The act of killing becomes normalised and widely accepted. Secondly, the hunting story excludes women as being smaller, weaker and reproductive. She has been prevented from participating in hunting. Her non-participation makes her ‘naturally’ inferior. Thus there occurs an equation of ‘hunting man’ and ‘reproductive women’, one destructive and one creative. Within this equation, the woman’s role as the life bearer is perceived as inferior quality in compared to man’s ability to hunt and kill.

The transition from a hunting civilization to an agrarian society is the second conceptual framework. Agricultural communities have a greater demand for labour, which typically includes a significant number of female labourers. In addition to this, it requires a larger number of children in the family. The men of the house eventually come to exercise authority over a woman's reproductive choices as a result of this. The second step in the development of agriculture is the domestication of animals. According to Lori Gruen, the trend toward taming animals for use in agriculture, combined with the requirement for an increase in labour, results in the subjugation of women at the hands of their male counterparts, which in turn led to their estrangement and oppression.[286]Elizabeth Fisher comments that in such agricultural society, human beings violate animals by enslaving them. Humans control the breeding of animals and perfect their behaviour and engage in other cruelties towards them.[287]

A religious concept that emerged alongside the development of agriculture is the subject of the third conceptual framework. On the one hand, nature supplies the conditions that are necessary for a good harvest, but on the other hand, nature can sometimes hinder human efforts. Natural disasters like floods, and droughts have wreaked havoc on the

[286] Lori Gruen, “Dismantling Oppression,” 74.

[287]Elizabeth Fisher,*Woman’s Creation* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979), 197.

agricultural sector. Because of this, people also begin to dread nature. Fear causes people to become alienated from their natural surroundings. Women are feared due to their ability to produce life, which caused them to be compared to the Earth. Because of this intense dread, there was a growing urge to exert dominance over both women and the natural world. Gruen says: "In religious mythology, if not in actual practice, women often served as symbols for uncontrollable and harmful and thus were sacrificed in order to purify the community and appease the Gods. Animals too were sacrificed, and it has been suggested that many animals were first domesticated not as food sources but as sacrificial creatures."[288]Thus both women and animals come to be viewed as the 'other' and this further strengthens the dualisms of man-woman and man-animal.

The rapid development of industry is the source of the fourth barrier that isolates humans from their natural surroundings. The scientific revolution that occurred in the sixteenth century gave rise to what is known as a "mechanistic worldview,"[289]which considers nature apart from humans as something to be studied and investigated. Once more, this lays the groundwork for males to dominate other aspects of the natural world. In order to acquire knowledge using the scientific approach, the observer (man) must be differentiated from the thing being observed (nature). The deeper the separation and detachment that man maintains from nature in pursuit of knowledge, the more legitimate it is for him to dominate both nature and animals. Lori Gruen writes: "By devaluing subjective experience, reducing living, spontaneous beings to machines to be studied, and establishing an epistemic privilege

[288] Lori Gruen, "Dismantling Oppression,"64.

[289] Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women , Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers,1990), 14.

based on detached reason, the mechanistic/ scientific mindset firmly distinguished man from nature, women, and animals."[290]

The emphasis on 'reason' for consideration of the worth of a being can be traced back to Western philosophical tradition. Kant works out a definition of a 'person'. Who is a 'person'? His answer is, one who is capable of choice by rational thinking is a person.[291] A person is thereby, worthy of respect and must have rights. This definition of a 'person' deals purely with qualities such as rationality, intelligence and conscious thinking. It is based on their intellect, on the capacity of reason that humans are identified by the philosopher and by many enlightenment thinkers as moral agents who have natural rights and should be treated as ends. Within this definition, both women and animals find no space. In fact in Western thought women and animals have been equated as inferiors. Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*[292] excludes both from participation in the moral life. They reject emotion altogether and accept reason and rationality as the yardstick to consider the worth of a being. Yet reason itself has been used as a justification for animal abuse. Ecofeminism sees the problem in accepting rationalism as the means of recognising the intrinsic worth of fellow beings. For them what counts as more important than reason or intellectual capacity is "emotional fellowship"[293]. They argue that to view animals as intrinsically valueless and inferior to man is "speciesist". Donovan explains: "It arbitrarily assumes that humans are worth more than other life forms. Speciesism is a concept borrowed from feminists and minority group theory.

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[290] Lori Gruen, "Dismantling Oppression," 64.

[291] Immanuel Kant, "Theory of Ethics," in *Kant Selections*, ed. Theodor M. Greene (New York: Scribner's,1929), 308-9

[292]Aristotle,*Nicomachean Ethics: A Critical Guide*, ed. Jon Miller (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[293] Mary Midgley, "Person and Non-Person" in *In Defense of Animals*, ed. by Peter Singer (New York: Blackwell, 1985), 53-54.

It is analogous to sexism and racism in that it privileges one group (humans, male, whites or Aryans) over another."[294]

Besides the emphasis on 'rationalism', there is another notion of 'complex consciousness' as the benchmark for animals to be regarded as valuable and worthy of respect. This too has been contested by ecofeminists. They believe that an idea of complex consciousness is not far removed from rational thought which was given prominence in Western thought. For ecofeminists, the common condition that unites humans with animals is sensibility, the capacity to feel pain and experience pleasure. If a being is capable of suffering there cannot be any moral justification to refuse to take that into consideration. Mary Midgley suggests that animals exhibit social and emotional complexity which can form deep, meaningful and subtle relationships.[295] It has to be mentioned in the current context that a similar debate over the question that whether women have souls or not has been prominent in Western philosophical tradition. The rejection of accepting women as equal to men and the refusal to give animals a moral status further point out how Western traditions have imposed the position of inferiority over women and animals. This again connects the two and strengthens the ecofeminist claim that liberation cannot be achieved in isolation. As all marginal are connected by forces of domination the struggle for equality involves all marginal issues: human and non-human.[296]

The women authors on the other hand give us narratives that represent the truths about the animal. Josephine Donovan stresses the importance of representation or as she says "right

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[294] Josephine Donovan, "Animal Rights and Feminist Theory" in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, ed Greta Gaard(Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 169.

[295] Mary Midgley, "Person and Non-Person" in *In Defense of Animals*, ed. by Peter Singer (New York: Blackwell, 1985), 53-54.

[296] Lisa Kemmerer, *Sister Species: Women, Animal and Social Justice* (USA: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 14.

representation"[297]. Right representation she thinks would, "liberate the 'thing', the literal, the natural, the absent referent- which is conceived as a presence, a form domination by falsifying, destructive signifiers."[298]In the works written by women authors, there have been instances of animal characters that have been portrayed with great care. The fact that these animals are portrayed as having characteristics that are traditionally classified as 'human' is what makes these depictions of animals truly unique. They are portrayed as spiritual beings, able to love, care for, and communicate with other people. They are portrayed as beings capable of consciousness and reflective thought. By doing so, the female authors are deconstructing the prevalent discourse, which views the living being as merely flesh, skin, or bones. The dismemberment of living things into inanimate parts is a tactic that modernity and capitalism have utilised in order to rationalise the atrocities that are committed against animals. The female authors are presenting marginal entities in ways that call into question dominant symbolic discourses that are often misleading. In every one of the stories, the 'animal' appears in a manner that is strikingly dissimilar to the representation that is generally accepted. They make an effort to portray 'it' as 'thou'; the 'inanimate' as the 'animate.' These authors do not try to force preconceived narratives or ideas onto the literal. They make an effort to present the truth.

Animal Issue and Literature:

Apart from exploring the bonds shared by women and nature ecofeminism tries to give voice to every other marginal subject around us. Greta Gaard writes in her article, *Living Interconnections with Animal and Nature*: "Ecofeminism is a theory that has evolved from various fields of feminist inquiry and activism: peace movements, labor movements,

[297] Josephine Donovan, "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: reading the Orange," in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, ed. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 76.

[298] Donovan, *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, 76.

women's health care, and the anti-nuclear, environmental, and animal liberation movement."[299]Ecofeminists consider the discussion surrounding the rights of animals to be one of the most significant issues. Animals are an essential component of the natural world. And in today's world, cruelty to animals is a major problem that needs to be addressed. One of the primary goals of ecofeminism is to advocate for the rights of animal subjects by giving them a voice. In addition to animals, other marginal subjects, such as outcasts, tribals, and people who are socially underprivileged are all important for ecofeminists. These sections of people share different bonds with nature. Representing their voices means resistance toward the dominant social systems that have been instrumental in suppressing their voices. There is interconnectedness between the marginal entities because they are all a part of Nature and are all deeply connected to it. Secondly, their shared position as being the marginal connects them. Thirdly patriarchal capitalism is the source of oppression for all marginalised groups, including women, the marginalised, indigenous people, animals, and the natural world. Therefore, the fight for the freedom of one person will inextricably involve all of the 'others' in some way. Sometimes two marginal voices mingle as one as in the case of Puran and Rani, a fawn or Charu and Gauri, a cow in *The Folded Earth* (2011).

The relationship that Charu has developed with her cow is unique in nature. The extent of the relationship can be partially explained in terms of materialist ecofeminism by the fact that she has developed a bond with the animals as a result of her work with them (such as milking them and leading them to graze), which suggests that she spends a lot of time with them. However, as we progress further into the book, we come to realise that the bond is not solely based on demand and supply. It is almost spiritual in nature. The following lines provide the very first glimpse we get of this wonderful connection between them:

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[299] Greta Gaard, "Living Interconnections with Animal and Nature," in*Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, ed. Greta Gaard (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 12.

> She told him of her five cows, specially of the black and white Jersey cow whom she called Gouri Joshi. Gouri had come as a large-eyed, timid, sweet-faced calf when Charu was a girl and whenever she was troubled or scolded by her grandmother she still ran to Gouri and buried her face in the cow's warm flanks, breathing in its comforting scent of dung and straw and milk. Gouri's eyes were dark pools of patience and had lashes that were a mile long. She never kicked, however long Charu held her.[300]

The female characters depicted in the novels possess a distinctive ability to exhibit affection and concern towards animals that primarily serve as providers of essential commodities. When we first meet Maya, she tells us about a connection she has with stray dogs in Hyderabad, her hometown. Since moving to Ranikhet, she has been able to form a connection with the dogs that live on the premises of the temple there. This exemplifies the remarkable ability of women to exhibit affection for animals without any ulterior motives. The act of assigning the name "Gouri Joshi" is an attempt at personifying the animal, so imbuing it with sentiments of affection. The cow, in her perspective, merits an equivalent level of reverence as that is accorded to any human being. Charu does not perceive the cow solely as a resource, but rather recognizes its status as a sentient animal.

There is another event that centres on the peculiar connection between people and animals. The incident that causes Gouri to sustain injuries is described in Chapter 4, which takes place in the meadows. Charu spends the entire day looking for her cherished cow, and when she finally discovers her wounded in the field, she is utterly devastated. After her unsuccessful attempt to save Gouri, she does not abandon her; instead, she remains by her side for as long as Gouri continues to survive. What has become clear to us is that these women do not consider their animals to be resources that can be utilised and abused in any way. Instead, they are considered as beings in their own right, sentient individuals who are

[300] Anuradha Roy, *The Folded Earth* (Gurgaon: Hachette India, 2011), 34.

capable of having sentiments for one another as well as the ability to reciprocate those feelings.

Another exceptional bond that is depicted in the novel is that of Puran with a little fawn. Like Charu, Puran names the fawn 'Rani'. Once more, the animal is endowed with the dignity and personhood of a being. These two marginal individuals, one a fawn and the other a social misfit, form a distinct sort of friendship occurs immediately upon their initial encounter. Roy writes:

> It was a fawn exquisite in its delicate beauty, its long eyelashes fencing in pools of brown that took up most of its pointed face and big moist nose. Puran knelt next to it, and groaned and cooed and slapped his thighs in delight. The fawn would not let anyone else come close. If they did, it moved away with careful dignity. But when Puran cooed, it turns its head in his direction took a step towards him and even allowed him to touch it, which he did with infinite tenderness.[301]

When discussing eco-consciousness or attempting to provide a theoretical explanation of man's relationship with nature, the novelist provides us with a different perspective by developing a character such as Puran. The bond between Puran and Rani is unique in nature. However, disaster soon befalls the situation. The influential people manage to severe the connection that has developed between these two distinct individuals. Rani is taken away from Puran and placed in a zoo as he is accused of illegally possessing a wild animal. Rani, on the other hand, refuses both food and water. Puran though has been released from jail has locked himself in his ramshackle home. Rani dies. The event completely destroys Puran. And in the name of modernity, we get to witness what these strong people are capable of doing to such innocent and defenceless beings. Diwan Sahib is the only person who could comprehend Puran's extraordinary capacity to communicate with animals. Not just the fawn, but also many others would come to him in order to be healed, to find shelter, and to receive affection. He says about Puran: "He could not talk to people but he could talk to animals. Animals

[301] Roy, *The Folded Earth*, 70.

trusted him. Foxes came to him if he called them. Injured bird arrived on his doorstep to be cured. Dogs with broken legs found their way to his cowshed."[302]

The relationship that exists between these two individuals, Puran and the fawn is peculiar in the sense that it cannot be explained in simple terms. The animals are no longer objects of observation. They are also capable of observation, have the ability to make decisions for themselves and have a conscious will. In modern societies animals or non-human nature are the subject of observation; man studies nature. This observation serves as the cornerstone around which his ever-growing body of knowledge is built. John Berger argues that this knowledge is the source of power that man exerts over the inferior in his book *About Looking*: "What we know about them is an index of our power, and thus an index of what separates us from them. The more we know, the further away they are."[303]

In Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* (2015) we encounter a similar woman-animal bond. The female protagonist Maya laments the loss of her deceased beloved dog in the opening scene of the novel *Cry, the Peacock*. She is shocked when she watches her deceased pet lying beneath a lime tree. When her husband gets home from work, he makes the necessary arrangements to cremate the body. Goutama, Maya's husband, is less affected by the event than she is. He places a tea order and requests a cup for Maya as well. Maya is still reeling from the tragedy, though. Goutama's words reflect how unaffected he is: " 'I set it away to be cremated', he said, 'it is all over. Come, won't you pour out my tea?' "[304]She is even more depressed by these words. She struggles to understand how he could be so unmoved in the face of such grief. Here, Desai highlights the close relationship between Maya and her pet dog Toto. She notes that even though Maya has a strong bond with the dog, her husband is

[302] Roy, *The Folded Earth*, 170.

[303]John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Vintage International, 1980), 16.

[304] Anita Desai, *Cry, the Peacock* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks,2015), 6.

unable to fully appreciate how strongly she feels. For Goutama, Toto is merely a pet that amuses and entertains its owners. For Maya Toto, however, is an individual capable of love and of receiving love. Desai writes: "Oh! She cried, helplessly, and ran to the door to see if the bed were not still there under the trees, but found it gone, and stood there, not knowing where to run next."[305]

Maya, Puran and Charu share a special bond with the animals in their lives. The bond is shaped not by imposing human subjectivity upon the non-human entity. The bond is special as it takes into account the 'otherness' of the non-human beings. This 'otherness' has been termed as 'anotherness' by Patrick D. Murphy in his article 'Voicing Another Nature'[306]. He explains it as something that goes beyond the hierarchical idea that shapes the 'other'. 'Anotherness' is rather the acceptance of the other in a non-hierarchical sense; the acceptance of the difference with respect. Both these two seemingly different beings connect and thereby form a whole yet retain their 'anotherness'. That is why the deer, Rani, is presented as a conscious being capable of loving and experiencing pain. She accepts Puran, loves him and when both are forcibly separated by the powerful people of the town, she refuses food and ultimately dies. The cultural myth that animals are not capable of complex emotions is deconstructed by the women authors. Mary Midgley, a contemporary animal rights theorist writes: "What makes our fellow beings entitled to basic consideration is surely not intellectual capacity but emotional fellowship." Animals exhibit, "social and emotional complexity of the kind which is expressed by the formation of a deep, subtle and lasting relationship."[307]

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[305] Desai, *Cry, the Peacock*, 11.

[306]Patrick D. Murphy, "Voicing Another Nature," in *A Dialogue of Voices: Feminist Theory and Bakhtin,* ed. Karen Hohne and Helen Wussow(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 61.

[307] Mary Midgley,"Person and Non-Person," in *In Defense of Animals*, ed. Peter Singer (New York: Blackwell Publication, 1985), 60.

In numerous instances in the books written by the women authors, an ecofeminist's concern for the marginal is made manifest. The powerful tend to oppress those who are on the margins. The lives of those on the margins are drastically disrupted when those who seek authority cause damage to natural environments. In some of the other works, there are allusions to the terrible treatment of animals. However, the issue of systematic animal cruelty in modern society is addressed in considerable depth in Desai's novel *Fire on the Mountain* (2015). In the works of Anita Desai, the concerns regarding animal rights and animal abuse take up a more prominent position. We learn from her writings about the severe degrees of cruelty that are inflicted upon animals for the profit industry. Raka, another female character, is the one who brings up the issue of brutal treatment of animals. In the rut, she comes upon the skeletal remains of many creatures. The laboratory that studies medicine makes use of these animals. In today's modern society, it is considered perfectly acceptable to slaughter animals for the purposes of scientific research. Lori Gruen writes: "Under the guise of scientific enquiry, dogs , cats, monkeys, mice, rats, pigs and other animals are routinely suffocated, starved, shocked, blinded, burned, beaten, frozen, electrocuted, and eventually killed. A majority of the experiments are conducted to satisfy curiosity rather than to improve anyone's health."[308]The answers to Raka's concerns about the factory that uses animals in its production are provided by Ram Lal, a native of the area who works as a cook for Nanda. Again, we get a character who is a native to the area, such as Charu or Puran, to be more aware of the environmental damage than the other characters belonging to different social strata.

It was Ram Lal who provided her with the vital information regarding the factory. The firm makes serums that are injected into patients. In addition, they do the experiments on animals. Ram Lal explains in a way that is both straightforward and insightful how the

[308] Lori Gruen, "Dismantling Oppression," 65.

factory generates harmful chemical waste, which in turn pollutes the natural environment. When animals consume that waste, they become aggressive and hurt people. And in order to get cured, one needs to have injections that were manufactured in a lab. This is what modernity does, it creates a problem by disrupting the natural balance and then claims to give a solution to the problem which in the first place never existed: "Jackals come at night to chew the bones. Then they go mad and bite the village dogs. The mad dogs run around, biting people."[309]

Raka evidently wants to know how the industry is constantly degrading the environment and putting animals to death. The worst victims of modernity are the poor inhabitants, the animals, and the natural world. Ecofeminist issues bring the voices of the marginalised to the fore. We can see that Anita Desai is addressing important ecofeminist concerns in her book. It must be noted that ecofeminists first concentrate on the impacts of pollution and environmental degradation on the lives of women and animals in order to make the connection between women's liberation, animal liberation, and justice for the environment. Pollutants such as damaging radiation, acid rain, toxic pesticides, and chemical waste first damage women's reproductive systems and result in mild to severe birth defects in their offspring. In laboratories, these substances are initially applied on animals. Second, the connection between environmental deterioration and animal oppression is shown through factory farming and meat consumption. Thus, the oppressive force of society links the health of women, animal rights, and the sanctity of nature. When one suffers, the other also suffers. Lori Gruen's remarks regarding this connection can be of value in our understanding of the relation between the oppression of women and the systematic cruelty of animals in the context of modernity: "Because women and animals are judged unable to comprehend

[309] Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, 49.

science and are thus relegated to the positions of passive objects , their suffering and death, tolerable in the name of profit and progress."[310]

Raka is more sensitive to these kinds of shifts in the natural world than Nanda. She has come to the conclusion that the waste from factories being dumped in natural areas is directly responsible for the insanity that afflicts the animals. Raka, despite Ram Lal's repeated warnings, continues to head over to the dumping site in order to conduct her investigation. And what she sees illustrates for us the problems that are associated with modernity. The sheer cruelty against animals and the complete lack of knowledge about the worse effects of the factory on nature and people make us rethink the model of modernity. She sees: "There were splotches of blood, there were yellow stains oozing through paper, there were bones and the mealy ashes of bones. Tins of Tulip ham and Kissan jam. Broken china, burnt kettles, rubber tyres and bent wheels."[311]

Her experiences in the midst of the factory's dumped rubbish provide us with a glimpse of the horrors that are associated with modernity. The industry generates garbage, and the waste causes illness in both people and animals in the surrounding area. The rapidly increasing heat around the plant site, as well as the dust storms in the lower sections of the mountain range, both provide additional evidence that the natural balance has been disrupted. Desai provides us with a detailed description of the garbage site: the heaps of bones and ashes in addition to the tins of Tulip ham and Kissan jam, broken china, burnt kettle, rubber tyres and bent wheels. These are products of modernity, of civilization that we are so proud of, and yet we frequently forget the brutality that is being carried out relentlessly to provide us with modern amenities. As the wheels of modernity continue to turn, what are left behind are piles of the skeletal remains of animals that were crushed under it. Josephine Donovan writes:

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[310] Lori Gruen, "Dismantling Oppression," 67.

[311] Anita Desai, *Fire on the Mountain* (Haryana: Random House India, 2015), 53.

"The scientific and experimental method converts reality into mathematical entities modelled on the physical universe, which, as seen in Newton's laws, is cast in the image of mechanism that operates according to fixed repetitions. No distinction is made between life forms such as human and animal bodies, which are seen as machines in the Cartesian view, and nonlife forms such as rocks."[312]

Animals as a source of enjoyment, particularly confined ones, have been present in wealthy houses for a considerable amount of time. However, the use of animals for the advancement of technical innovation is a relatively new invention. The fact that the house of Nanda's father in Kashmir has served as a zoo provides us with an insight into how the strong men of the region dealt with the animals under their care. Nanda's father has been an avid collector of exotic animals. He has been an explorer and adventurer and delighted in conquest rather than communion with the natural world. It is precisely this attitude of being superior to nature that causes him to be indifferent towards the people who live in nature as well. The zoo is a symbol of masculine superiority, and Nanda's description provides us with a glimpse of this emblem: "'His private zoo.' 'Yes, animals too he collected, I forgot to tell you.' Nanda laughed out in relief. 'Oh, the house in Kashmir was full, full of animals, the strangest ones. He had a bear, you know , a great big Himalayan bear that he had found as a cub in the forest when he was hunting...So there it lived, in our house, in a cage, like a pet King Kong.'"[313] Or when she says: "We had a cage of leopard cats that had that honour. My father said the leopard cats were the fiercest of all creatures, and they never, like the bear, grew accustomed to us...He would feed them himself. They loved fish."[314]

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[312]Josephine Donovan, "Animal Rights and Feminist Theory" in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* ed. Greta Gaard (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 174.

[313] Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, 104.

[314] Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, 105.

While giving the description, Nanda's face glows. She thinks the reference to the amazing zoo will fill Raka with a sense of wonder and excitement. But Raka's reaction is different. The questions she asks and the expression she gives disappoint Nanda. Raka asked, "In a cage? Always?"[315]or"What would have happened if you had let them together?"[316]And the anguish and sadness that we see in Raka's eyes when she hears about the terrible things that have happened to some of the wildest and strongest animals in the forest gives us the idea that Raka is not pleased with the atrocities that are committed against the innocent animals. This raises a lot of questions and concerns. One difference between Nanda and Raka is their perspective on the use of animals in research and testing. Surprisingly, Nanda has exhibited a great deal of concern over the exploitation of animals in factories, but when it comes to her having a zoo in her youth, she appears to be untouched by the experience. Secondly, it is not only modernity that oppresses the marginal; the flag bearers of patriarchy, such as Nanda's father, or her husband, or Raka's father, all have oppressed the 'other': women, nature, animals, and those who are marginalised all have a common experience of being oppressed. The ecofeminist belief that capitalist patriarchy is the cruellest force that subjugates all other marginal entities again appears in a comprehensive way in this novel.

One of the most important aspects of ecofeminism is the recognition of the importance of several voices, particularly those that have been marginalised by patriarchal and capitalist structures. Ecofeminists work toward a creating world where everyone is included, treated equally, and given access to opportunities. It is a multidisciplinary field of research that acknowledges the impossibility of the emancipation of a single oppressed minority within the context of a society that is centred on power. In order for the marginalised communities to be freed and emancipated, there needs to be a shift in the

[315] Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, 104.

[316] Desai, *Fire on the Mountain,* 104.

established order of society. Because everything is interconnected and coexists in nature, animals, non-human nature and women, who are oppressed by the dominant values of capitalist society, need to discover a method of emancipation that is effective for all marginalised groups within the society. Gaard writes: "No attempt to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature. Its theoretical base is a sense of self most commonly expressed by women and various other non-dominant groups- a self that is interconnected with all life."[317]

In *The Village by the Sea* (2015), another one of Desai's works, the characters that are important to the plot are on the periphery. In contrast to *Fire on the Mountain,* this book focuses mostly on the perspectives of characters who are members of the most impoverished segment of the population. These voices include those of male characters like Hari, the voices of female characters like Hari's sisters Bela and Kamal, as well as the voices of animals. Bela and Kamal, upon hearing an alarming noise outside the hut, rush to investigate the source of the commotion. They watch as a group of men kill a mongoose that they had captured. Kamal is taken aback after seeing this. The residents of the area, on the other hand, are unmoved by the event because they believe the mongoose is to blame for the damage done to the coconuts. The only person who believes it's terrible to slaughter innocent animals is this poor rural girl: "A poor, small, helpless mongoose- she did not believe it did anything so wicked; it was a mistake. And even if it did drink the coconut water and destroy the coconuts, was it necessary to hunt it with a dozen sticks, a pack of wild dogs and a band of howling men? It frightened her to see the ferocity with which they had destroyed the little thing."[318]

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[317] Greta Gaard, "Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature" in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animal , Nature* , ed. Greta Gaard (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 1.

[318] Desai, *The Village by the Sea* (New Delhi: Penguin Random House, 1982), 83.

The patriarchal system of capitalism requires the elimination of anything it deems to be in the way of its pursuit of profit and self-interest. They have little to no regard for people who are poor and underprivileged as well as animals that are defenceless and vulnerable. Another instance of extreme cruelty being inflicted upon a defenceless animal is when goons kill Pinto, the dog that belonged to Bela and Kamal and has been their pet. After Pinto has spent some time in the village with his masters, Hari discovers him there for the first time. Since that time, he and his sisters have treated the dog as if it were a member of their family and taken care of it accordingly. The local thugs murder the defenceless animal as an act of retaliation against the family, which has a significant amount of debt to pay off. Therefore, the murder of Pinto can be seen as a warning to the family.

The slaughter of the animals can just look like a senseless act of violence, but it symbolises a number of other things. It is done as an act of vengeance against Puran in the first instance, which takes place in *The Folded Earth*. Because Puran represents the antithesis of everything that the capitalist patriarchal system stands for, he emerged as a potential danger. He is loving and caring, and he respects the natural world around him. His ideal environment would be one that is free of unnecessary distractions and clutter. His affinity for animals and the outdoors is rooted in a profound spirituality. The profound connections he feels with the natural world and the creatures in it cannot be explained in any other way than via his extraordinary capacity to connect with others. Throughout *Fire on the Mountain,* there are depictions of brutal treatment of animals. The zoo that Nanda's father, a successful businessman, built in their backyard is filled with animals that he had personally captured. This is a demonstration of male superiority over the ‘other’: the helpless animals. The cruelties that the male characters in the book perpetrate upon the animals and the female characters are examples of toxic masculinity, which holds the belief that establishing one's superiority by dominance over the 'other' can achieve this goal. The sexual violence and

killing of Ila Das in Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* are brought to mind when we consider the fact that Hari's favourite dog, Pinto, has been murdered in this story by the similar brutal force. Both of these activities share a few common characteristics. To begin, powerful people are the ones who commit them. Second, the act is, in reality, a threat to a group of individuals who dare to challenge the patriarchal structures of the capitalist system. Ecofeminists think that there is a single malevolent force comprised of patriarchy and capitalism that is the driving force behind all types of dominance.[319] All of the peripheral entities are brought together by this.

For this reason, the issue of animals, along with other marginal issues, are interconnected and ecofeminism aspires to empower all in order to create an alternative world order. The fact that the current system has resulted in the formation of a twisted cycle of lying and manipulation is the source of the problem. Once one is involved in such a situation, there is no way out of it. Because of this, Hari, who is confronted with such injustices in his own culture and community, places his hope in modernity even though it is a mirage. However, as the story progresses, we see that the modern world does not provide Hari with an easier path, and he faces a variety of challenges. The lives of the people in Thul are deeply entwined with poverty. When their mother became very ill, the only thing that they were able to do was summon a local healer, who turned out to be a fraudster. This man, who claims to be able to heal ailments with magical potions, is, in reality, a drunken psychopath who steals the children's mother's silver ring before fleeing the scene. The children have nothing else of value. These people, who are considered to be among the most marginalised in the land, are suffering in the gravest possible ways at the hands of culture as well as modernity. Existing social systems are plagued with widespread instances of corruption. It does not appear that

[319] Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983).

the poor have anything to look forward to. The city and the factory are the only two options left at this point. These choices appear to be a valuable chance for them. But the question that needs to be answered is whether or not the new model of the world would actually offer a better future for them. Is there a positive impact of modernity on those who live in poverty? What we come to realise is that the discriminations that exist between the centre and the margin are still there even in urban settings. The factory, on the other hand, is destructive to the basic foundation upon which the poor subsist, wreaking havoc not only on the lives of individuals but also on the environment. Therefore, the short answer to the question is that modernism does not live up to the promise it has made. The concern that Desai has for those on the margins is not limited to a single gender or social class. She represents everyone when she speaks. Because of the injustices that are generated by culture and modernity, not only the males but also the women and the non-human environment are put in harm's way. Ecofeminism begins with concerns about nature and women but quickly expands beyond these limited confines to become a voice for all types of dominance.[320]

A similar situation can be witnessed in the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (2008) by Kamala Markandaya. Modernity enters the village in the form of a tannery, an industry that functions primarily on the skins of dead animals. The novel does not directly criticise the cruelty that is inflicted upon animals in the name of modernity and instead focuses primarily on the effects that development projects have on the lives of the less fortunate inhabitants of a village. Yet, there are instances of animal cruelty depicted in the scope of the novel. The tannery industry itself bears the proof of this cruelty; an aspect of modernity that Lori Gruen feels is responsible for the emotional distance between man and animals. She thinks that this is the peculiar mindset that she terms as scientific, that sees animals as beings devoid of emotional

[320] Carol J. Adams, *Neither Man nor Beast: Feminism and the Defence of Animals* (UK: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2018), 60.

intelligence, feelings and can thereby be used as objects of experimentation.[321]The tanning and fur industries are notorious for their use of inhumane practises that involve the mistreatment of animals. The fur and tannery industries are built on the manipulation of women as well. They do this by persuading women that wearing fur or leather makes them more beautiful and glamorous and bestow a "high class status" upon them. It is commonly believed that women who wear the skins of deceased animals exude confidence. As a result, women are eventually exploited by the profit-oriented industry, which is controlled by men. Both women and animals are subjugated to the will of men in this world. Animals are subjected to unimaginable suffering so that these industries can continue to function and prosper. Animals are ensnared, subjected to cruel treatment, and ultimately put to death for their fur and skin. Lori Gruen makes the observation that under the framework of the capitalist society, both women and animals are subject to systematic forms of control and exploitation: "The real cover-up, however, is the one perpetrated by industries that see both women and animals as manipulatable objects. Women are conditioned to believe that they must alter or disguise what is undesirable-nature-at great physical, psychological, and economic expense to themselves and at immeasurable cost to animals."[322]A small number of people, most of whom are men, have accumulated an immense fortune as a direct result of the cruelty and manipulation that has taken place. Because these profit sectors play such an important part in the process of the global economy, the exploitation of women and animals is seen to be acceptable.

[321]Gruen,"Dismantling Oppression", 66.

[322]Gruen,"Dismantling Oppression", 71.

Ecofeminism and Feminism in Relation to the Animal Issue:

Within the theoretical framework of feminism, this relationship between women's issues and animal issues is rarely brought to the forefront for discussion. Even though they advocate for the equality and freedom of women, mainstream forms of feminism including liberal feminism, marxist feminism, and socialist feminism do not question the fundamental socioeconomic system that controls and exploits women. For instance, liberal feminism strives for women's freedom by advocating for equal access to positions of power and authority with males. According to liberal feminists, the problem with patriarchy lies in the failure of patriarchy to recognise the competency of women and the status of women as equal to men. This failure is the root of the problem. They place a strong emphasis on rational thought as the foundation for establishing moral judgments. Liberal feminists do not go deeply into the issue of social institutions and the underlying exploitative system that underpins such institutions as a foundation for their ideology. Their position excludes concerns of animals and the non-human nature whose exploitation springs from the same systems of oppression that they themselves have been subject to. Dorothy Dinnerstein writes: "And an equal- right-for-women stance that remains oriented to an otherwise unchanged social reality is blind hope."[323]

Marxist feminism is a school of thought that examines patriarchal structures and proposes that economic equality is the key to achieving liberation for women. It is a central tenet of Marxist feminism to acknowledge that the subjugation of women is intrinsically linked to another, more systemic form of oppression: that of the working class at the hands of the bourgeoisie. Marxist Feminists have the belief that the incorporation of women into the industrial process can lead to the emancipation of women. In spite of this, one of the most

[323] Dorothy Dinnerstein,"Survival on Earth: The Meaning of Feminism,"*Peach Review. A journal of Social Justice* 2, no. 4 (Dec. 2007): 7 ,tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1040265900/ 8425566.

problematic aspects of Marxist feminism is the way it views the issue of animals. This vision reflects the prevalent notion that man is superior to animals and can utilise animals for his benefit. Marx makes the distinction between humans and animals in his "Manuscript from 1844" by pointing out that humans lead conscious lives, but animals' lives are predicated on the satisfaction of urgent requirements. Lori Gruen commenting on Marxist Feminism writes: "While quite different in many ways from liberals, the feminists who follow in the Marxist tradition continue to maintain their hierarchical position with regard to animals and natural world."[324]

As it links gender issues with class struggles, the current socialist feminist discourse has been successful in expanding the scope of feminism in general. This is because it connects gender issues with class struggles. They study and analyse systems, and they advocate for significant societal institution reform based on the structure of existing social institutions. They take a firm stance in support of women's rights to economic opportunity. In spite of this, it does not address the problem of animal emancipation when it discusses the various hierarchies and dualisms that are pervasive in society. Concerns for animals and other nonhuman nature are conspicuously absent from the framework of socialist feminist discourse. The problem with radical feminism may be broken down into two parts. We have no choice but to acknowledge that radical feminism is aware of the relationship that exists between women and the natural world, whether it is animal or nonhuman nature. However, the relationship that it explains is one that is based on essentialism; both nature and women are similar in that they are creatures that care for and nurture others. Second, it makes the assumption that if men were replaced by women, there would not be a significant increase in the indiscriminate killing of animals and the destruction of natural habitats. What is missed by radical feminism is the fact that the link between woman and nature may be described in

[324] Lori Gruen, "Dismantling Oppression", 77.

terms of a shared history of subjugation at the hands of an order, a system that forms the basis of the current global order. There is no path to emancipation that does not involve challenging the status quo and making necessary adjustments. Lori Gruen says: "The Radical feminist position, though at the other extreme from liberal, Marxists, and socialist feminism, also produces a particular patriarchal notion: the belief that woman and nature are essentially connected. This view accepts a type of determinism that forever separates woman and man."[325]

Ecofeminism and Animal Liberationist Theory:

There are two most popular theorists who propose theoretical foundations for animal liberation: Tom Regan and Peter Singer. Tom Regan proposes a right-based theory. According to Regan, every being that is subject-of-a-life has an inherent value and therefore has rights.[326] This 'value', he bestows upon self-conscious beings that are capable of desires and beliefs and have a conscious idea of the future. The second critic is Peter Singer whose idea of animal liberation is based on the concept of equal consideration. According to Singer, every being who is capable of pleasure and pain is subject to moral consideration. For Singer to disregard an animal's pain and suffering when making a decision would denote as 'speciesist'- that means to regard one's own species as superior in comparison to other species.[327]

The problem with theories proposed by the animal liberationists is that these are based either on reason or on emotion. Yet by focusing exclusively on the role of reason or emotion would be objectionable as animals in day to day interaction with humans are not always just

[325] LoriGruen, "Dismantling Oppression", 78.

[326] Tom Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights" in *In Defense of Animals*, ed. Peter Singer (New York: Blackwell, 1985) 23-24.

[327] Peter Singer,*Animal Liberation* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), iii.

animals. Similarly, humans are not just humans. There is a bond of friendship and love and care that can also shape the relationship between humans and animal. The animal liberation theories thus can be looked upon as theories that do not reject the dualism of a subject and object (man-animal), they never connect the two. Gruen says: "As long as the theories that advocate the liberation of animals rely on abstraction, the full force of these consequences will remain too far removed to motivate a change in attitude."[328]

Ecofeminists advocate for a shift in mentality. Other ideologies, such as feminism and animal freedom, are unable to triumph over the duality that permeates contemporary society. As long as there remains a dichotomy between the self and another, there will always be a category of the 'other,' and attaining the goal of emancipation will never be possible under these circumstances. Ecofeminism recognises that in order to have a complete theory that is also inclusive of emancipation, the foundations must be established on the basis of sympathy and compassion. Ecofeminism seeks to remove the prevailing system that produces dualism and opposes the dualistic conceptions that are used in society today. It promotes an alternative value system in which the 'other' (animals, marginal groups and societies, and non-human nature) is re-evaluated. It acknowledges the thread of oppression that runs through every form of exploitation directed at all socially marginal entities. In addition to this, it asserts that because all marginalised groups are interconnected, the freedom of one is not possible without the emancipation of the other. Ecofeminism connects, and attempts to resolve dualism. Regarding this connection, Ynestra King observes: "Life on earth is an interconnected web, not a hierarchy. There is no natural hierarchy, human hierarchy is projected onto nature and then used to justify social domination. Therefore, ecofeminist

[328] Lori Gruen, "Dismantling Oppression", 99.

theory seeks to show the connections between all forms of domination, including the domination of non-human nature, and ecofeminist practice is necessarily anti-hierarchical."[329]

On the one hand, feminist theory concentrates almost exclusively on the problem of oppression of women and, as a result, frequently ignores other related issues. On the other hand, the animal liberationists focus on the sufferings of one group while failing to recognise that animal suffering is tied up with other forms of oppression directed towards other marginal entities. All these marginal issues need to be addressed simultaneously as all are connected by the shared experience of oppression in the hands of capitalist patriarchy. Because ecofeminism recognises that the fight for the liberation of one marginal community is inextricably linked to the fight for the liberation of another similar community or group, it has been successful in uniting all marginal communities and the various liberation movements that they have been engaged in. Because of this, ecofeminists are more concerned about animal rights issues. As Lori Gruen suggests, "any interpretation of an ecofeminist vision must include a re-examination of our relationship to nonhuman animals."[330]

Some theorists such as Marta Kheel and Carol Adams believe that the ecofeminist framework of the West has failed to locate animal issues as central to the ethics involving women and nature. Contrary to this belief we have the writings of the Indian women authors where we find a strong presence of the animal issue within the context of the women-nature connection. They have successfully established that when concern for the non-human nature is paramount, the animal issue is bound to arise. That is why we have a deeply moving tale of a cow, a fawn and genuine concern for the animal kingdom surface in Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth*. We have a recurring reference to the vanishing population of birds and animals

[329]Ynestra King, "The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology," in *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*, ed. Judith Plant (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1989), 19.

[330] Lori Gruen,"Dismantling Oppression: An Analysis of Connection between Women and Nature," in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animal, Nature,* ed. Greta Gaard (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 61.

due to a tannery factory in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve.* We have a story of a pet dog in *Village by the Sea* and a reference to the dried bones and skeletons of animals who have been used in the cosmetic and chemical factory in *Fire on the Mountain*. The women authors by relocating the animal issue within the praxis of ecofeminist framework reshape the fundamentals of ecofeminism as a theory.

Ecofeminism and the Issue of the Indigenous:

Adivasi population in India and the tribal population around the world have played a key role in preserving and protecting the forests and the biodiversity they inhabit. Their culture is deeply rooted in the belief of living in harmony with nature. Their existence is threatened by multiple forces of a capitalist order. Ecofeminist theorists in both the West and the East are deeply troubled by the atrocities committed by wealthy, developed countries against the indigenous peoples of the world. Kristin Shrader has centred her work on the issue of colonialism and the capacity of dominant nations to oppress and take advantage of vulnerable tribal communities. Shrader in her book *Environmental Justice – Creating Equality, Reclaiming Democracy* (2002) has presented numerous examples of white man's atrocities over indigenous groups. She demonstrates how large corporate houses in the United States have been breaching health, safety, and environmental norms for the advantage of a small number of people who manage the corporation. She talks about companies like Kerr-McGee, which are responsible for the poisoning, harassment, and eventual death of a whistleblower named Karen Silkwood. She made an effort to bring to light the illegal activities carried out by the corporation located outside of Oklahoma City. As a result of being exposed to radiation, the miners, the majority of whom are members of an indigenous American tribe, have serious health effects. Lung cancer claims the lives of many. Not only does it result in the deaths of members of the indigenous labour group who are employed at the mine, but it also taints the water sources that these indigenous people rely on. As a result of this exposure

to contaminated water sources throughout the town as a whole, many people have been put in grave danger and ultimately lost their lives. The Urarina people of the Amazon have been also affected by corporations that are primarily oil drillers from various developed nations. In Nigeria, she points out the Shell oil company has destroyed the Ogoni agriculture and fishing lands.[331]

Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha in their book *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India* (1993) gives us an Indian perspective in the context of the exploitation of marginal communities in India.[332]They begin their book with a picture of contrasts that portrays a developing society where a perpetual conflict is boiling up within the rich and the poor due to the usage of natural resources. Consequently, there are small fishing villages and agricultural communities, as well as large corporate houses and companies that construct power plants and hydroelectric dams. These communities may be found all over the world. There is a significant divide between the marginal and tribal communities and the corporate houses in terms of the usage and exploitation of the same resources. These resources include land, water, and forests. The marginalised populations in India are going through a crisis that is quite similar to what is happening in the West. Their lands are being taken away from them, their water is being poisoned, and their forests are being decimated by the force of capitalism. The ecological catastrophe poses a threat to the very existence of these communities as a result of their close relationship to the natural world in which they live. These communities have been kept in the dark regarding the primary historical current of progress. In a number of instances, industrialization and mining operations have been responsible for the uprooting of indigenous village communities. Because of modernization,

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[331]Kristin Shrader-Frechette, *Environmental Justice- Creating Equality, Reclaiming Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 118.

[332]Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India* (California: University of California Press, 1992), 5.

the communities have been compelled to abandon their traditional lands and become refugees and nomads in the city.

In their advocacy of the rights of the marginalised the women authors time and again bring forward the issues of the indigenous, their knowledge and their struggles for survival. Markandaya in her first novel *The Nectar in a Sieve* focuses on the struggles of rural women and shows how their lives are affected when modernity sets foot in a village. In *The Coffer Dams* Markandaya shifts her focus on the issue of race and shows that when nature is exploited by modernity the lives of the indigenous are affected beyond repair. The white masters who have come to the Indian village to erect the dam cause massive disruption in the natural flow of nature and in the lives of the poor marginalised communities. Building the dam is clearly a step towards modernisation of the young nation. The whole idea of modernity focuses primarily on the control of nature and using it for the benefit of mankind. The dam shuts down the natural flow of the river and forces it to move through narrow gateways. The results can be beneficial but they can cause devastation of immeasurable amounts. The raging river can create havoc in the lives of those who are closely connected to the river. These are the poor villagers, the farmers, and the people of the tribal community. These marginal entities whose lives are inextricably related to nature are the worst affected. Many among the makers of the dam such as Lefevre are aware of the mighty strength of the river. The locals have knowledge of the river and that knowledge helps them to adjust their lives with the river and the natural flow of it and its whimsies too. A peaceful cohabitation becomes possible and beneficial as well for the locals. But the knowledge based on an understanding of ecology and human lives is absent among westerners. They view nature as an obstacle in their ways of progress and it has to be controlled for the triumph of mankind. This fundamental difference between the perspectives of the East and the West creates a problem as it is the Western ideas of modernity based on Western knowledge prevail over the

third world and begin to rule nature and humans alike. They devalue the ancient knowledge that talks about harmony in nature, of the divinity in it and the importance of maintaining balance in order to survive. This results in disruption as nature is being dismantled. The effects are seen in the lives of the poor Indians.

The outlook of the white masters towards the natives stems from the colonial past. The relationship between the ruler and the ruled rests on two centres: first the overdeveloped centre and second the underdeveloped periphery.[333]This colonial relationship has expanded its grasp to encompass the harmonious interaction that existed between man and nature in times before the advent of colonialism. The overall dynamic has shifted from one of collaboration and coexistence to one of dominance and exploitation after colonisation takes place. And the white masters would always resort to using force and violence in order to keep their hold on their slaves. Not only was it utilised to exert control over nature, but also over the people who were deeply entwined with it. We find a reflection of such implementation of violence in the forcible uprooting of the tribal community from the site of the dam. The whites do not care about their lives in the least. It would be inaccurate to argue that only the wealthy white masters are indifferent toward the plight of the underprivileged; this attitude is shared by many. There is an inherent hierarchy within the cultural setting of Indian society. Therefore, people like Krishnan look down on people like Bashiam and consider them to be below him in status. The character of Bashiam is a member of the local indigenous tribe. He is a member of Krishnan's team and has often shown himself to be a vital contribution to the project of constructing the dam. When it comes to presenting the complexity of power relationships inside races, his voice becomes increasingly crucial.

[333] Maria Mies. *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Zed Books, 1989).

Bashiam has witnessed the devastation that technology wreaks not just on the natural world but also on the people of impoverished villages and indigenous groups that have a profound affinity for the natural world. The marginalised tribal people have an incredible eco-consciousness, which stops them from participating in the mindless technological ambitions set up by people like Clinton or Mackendrick or, for that matter, Krishnan. Their ancestors' knowledge has given them the ability to sense the harmony that exists in nature and has also given them the understanding of what may occur if that equilibrium is disturbed. Because of modernization, Bashiam has watched his family be forced to uproot themselves and leave their lands. He is also aware that even with the most meticulous planning; a man-made structure cannot withstand the weight of a natural disaster no matter how well it is designed. Markandaya uses the character of Bashiam to bring attention to the significance of traditional knowledge, which, in many contemporary cultures, is not given much weight. She writes: "It was this older knowledge that inhibited him, prevented him falling in line with the others. They made their plans, seduced by statistics: but he had seen what a cyclone could do, had cowered before the storms that swept down the hills to burst in the valleys, knew what mincemeat a rogue monsoon could make in one night of the most careful design."[334]

Here in this novel, we see that the white-skinned foreigners perceive the indigenous knowledge as valueless. This devaluation is clear when Clinton and his associates speak of the natives, the locals with disrespect. On the one hand, the destruction of ecology and the devaluation of indigenous knowledge systems give rise to violence against women, tribal communities and locals alike. Secondly, violence against nature also comes from this devaluation as "natural as the object of knowledge is violated when modern science destroys the integrity of nature, both in the process of perception as well as manipulation."[335]Shiva

[334] Kamala Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams* (Navi Mumbai: Penguin Random House, 2008), 18.

[335]Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited. 2004), 26.

explains that Western knowledge systems that are based on reductionist science presents facts which are socially constructed. She means that these ‘facts’ bear the markings of capitalist, bourgeois and patriarchal systems. It is through these lenses that the West justifies and implements the so called scientific knowledge over the other cultures and communities.

The character Bashiam in Roy's *The Folded Earth* (2010) brings to mind Puran, a social outcast, in a number of ways. In a manner quite similar to that of Bashiam, Puran possesses a type of consciousness that recognises non-human nature as being significant and worthy of respect and care. The individuals who live in today's metropolitan society lack the wisdom that someone like Puran, an outcast, possesses. Even Bashiam is not like the people he serves. He is not one of these males who takes everything at face value and obediently follows every instruction given to him by their white superiors. Bashiam is not convinced by the evidence presented by Clinton's campaign. He is familiar with the workings of nature and is aware of the potential damage that nature's wrath could cause to the edifice that the white overlords are planning. Clinton is aware of the tension that is there in Bashiam. Clinton is aware that Bashiam is still sceptical, but he does not inquire as to why Bashiam feels this way. Clinton's pride in his status as the white master hinders him from consulting Bashiam and listening to what he has to say as Bashiam is a member of the local tribe. In this village, he is a respected member of the indigenous community. Because of this, his expertise in the site and the flaws in the structure are not taken into consideration during the building process. Surprisingly, it is not only the white engineers who hold the view that indigenous knowledge is worthless; other engineers, including the Indian designers who work on the project, also hold this view. When it comes to a country like India which is so firmly divided along class lines, things can get complicated due to the complexity of the race issue. The natives refer to him as a "jungly-wallah," which roughly translates to "a primitive just come down off the woods." A member of the indigenous class is looked down upon by these locals since they

are members of the upper social classes in the society. As a result, there is a close connection between the many methods through which the oppression of society's marginalised groups occurs. Helen's compassion for these individuals, her worry for the natural environment that is continually being harmed, and her closeness to Bashiam all provide evidence that suggests that there is a common thread that unites all of these seemingly disparate entities together. Helen, too, is ignored; her opinions are not considered, and no one seems to notice how lonely she is. The ecofeminist concept that all forms of marginal oppression emerge from the same capitalist patriarchal worldview is illustrated by the way in which Clinton treated the natural world, his wife, and the people that lived there. In addition to that, the story sheds light on the implicit racial dynamics that are present in Eastern cultures as well. When we work toward the goal of constructing a framework for Indian ecofeminism, it is important to keep this facet in mind.

In the works of these female authors, the most disadvantaged members of society, the social misfits are usually people who have a more in-depth knowledge of the environment. Their connection to the land and the surrounding forests goes quite deep. They oppose the so-called progressive endeavours that are made in an effort to control nature. These influential figures who attempt to tame nature appear multiple times across the canon of works written by women authors. In the story *The Coffer Dams*, the white masters, in *The Folded Earth*, the generals and brigadiers and in *Nectar in a Sieve,* the owners of the tannery are all responsible for destroying nature. And as nature is destroyed the lives of the poor are also disrupted. This is done in the name of ‘modernity’. These individuals have a consensus over the meaning of the term ‘development’. According to their perspective, development or progress can only be understood in terms of human dominance over nature. People of the land, on the other hand, include characters like Puran (*Nectar in a Sieve*), Hari (*Village by the Sea*), Rukmani (*Nectar in a Sieve*), and Nathan (*Nectar in a Sieve*). They are regarded as low and inferior on the

social ladder, but they have a greater concern for the environment. These folks are aware of how important it is to let nature take its course unimpeded and to keep the ecological balance intact in order to have a thriving ecosystem. The development exemplified by the white characters in this novel is more problematic than it is beneficial. They have convinced themselves that they are better than the people around them, which keep them from engaging in conversation with the locals. Clinton thinks, "No modern project could advance if one had first to allay every tribal anxiety: nor did he feel disposed to exert himself to sway a minority of one. His position was not only far below in the power scale, but that the towering a voracious terms of modern commitment diminished him to insignificance."[336]Clinton's attitude, his ice cold silence show Bashiam where he belongs: the bottom of the ladder and no one is going to listen to him.

Helen is the one person who has an on-going need for Bashiam's counsel, places a high value on his opinions, and recognises the full potential that a man like Bashiam possesses. As soon as she decides to learn more about the tribe and its members, Bashiam is the only person she wants as her companion. Helen is able to make out the various tribes from a distance. She has the ability to empathise, yet she is still an outsider. On the other hand, the fact that Bashiam is a member of the tribe gives her the possibility of gaining access to the private world of the tribal people. She is interested in Bashiam as a confidant for more than one reason. The majority of the remaining residents are of a higher social status in southern India. Their own sense of superiority and pride colours their perspectives of the indigenous community. They do not desire any kind of association with the members of the indigenous community. Thus Bashiam seems to be the right choice. This marginal character is even named as "civilised jungly-wallah"[337]by the locals. When we make an effort to

[336]Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 19.

[337]Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 41.

comprehend the struggles endured by these marginal humans, the significance of Bashiam's character becomes clear. Because of Helen's relationship with him, we are given the opportunity to observe how these communities are evolving on a daily basis. The changes in society have an effect not only on the traditional ways in which they have always lived but also on the ways in which they think. It is because of him that Helen and the readers are getting an up-close and personal look at the way the tribal people live, which is normally hidden from view. She finds Bashiam to be peculiar in some ways. She discovers that Bashiam likes machines and that he is fascinated by the smooth and precise way in which machines operate. Helen sees this affection for machines as a requirement, a requirement for the time when everything will be controlled by the machine and everyone will have no choice but to accept it. She draws parallels between Bashiam and Clinton's love of technology and machinery. For Bashiam, machines have the potential to become a means of subsistence and a glimmer of hope for a more fulfilling life, in contrast to Clinton, for whom they are instruments to demonstrate dominance.

When Helen finally makes the decision to enter the village and the tribal zone, Bashiam is the one whom she approaches first. She is aware that there are others like Krishnan or Das, and that despite the fact that they are members of the local communities, they hold biased perceptions of the individuals who belong to the tribes. Helen is aware that the actions of these individuals are motivated by a sense of pride. However, Helen does not have any negative feelings for Bashiam. She is aware that the only person in the community who would be able to advise her and assist her in comprehending the natives, their ways of life, and the hardships they face at the hands of modernity is this local, a social outcast. Here too there is an element of surprise for Helen. In the first place, she was perplexed by Krishnan's lack of compassion for the locals, and in the second place, she was taken aback by the fact that Bashiam believes that modernity may bring about significant improvements in

the lives of the people, his people. Bashiam is under the impression that his passion for machines is significantly more vital than Clinton's. Bashiam views the machinery or the project that he works on as a gateway to a better living for the people of his community.

Through Bashiam, Markandaya offers a concept of modernity that is not wholly negative. In societies where the underclass is repressed by the upper class inside their own cultural systems, we observe a similar projection of modernity. Other novels also include this element. These novelists, like Markandaya, are portraying a modernity that doesn't necessarily oppress the other, a modernity that aids in breaking the cultural chains that tie the marginal in various ways and exploit them. A similar idea has been presented in Desai's novel *Village by the Sea*. The central character Hari is relocated to the city to make money. His cultural obligations prevent him from earning a decent wage and supporting his family. But once he gets to the city, he picks up watch repair skills and learns how to survive in a strange atmosphere. He has faith that he will be able to survive when the factory is built thanks to his ability to repair watches. In a similar vein, Bashiam believes that modernity's entrance and eventual triumph are both inevitable. He is also aware that they are viewed with contempt by his own Indian society. And it is only with the aid of modernization that they will ultimately be able to work, provide for their own needs, and survive.

Helen is perplexed by Bashiam's conviction. While Bashiam, a local, could not foresee the devastation that the project would eventually bring over time, she could see that it had already done a lot of damage and would continue to do so. Bashiam's definition of modernity is accurate, but only to a certain point. Modern initiatives, like building the dam, undoubtedly benefit the marginalised, but they also have long-term effects that will ultimately be detrimental to people like Bashiam and the society in which he lives. The worst of it will have to be experienced by them. The land and the natural world are integral parts of their way of life. Development initiatives promise them a higher quality of life, and to some

extent, they fulfil those expectations. Bashiam is sure that this new construction amidst the hills will ensure survival for many in spite of the fact that it has already uprooted people from their own lands. What makes him think so is their struggle against natural calamity: "The mainstream of memory was clogged with sharper happenings, with storm and rain, the long draught, a periodically over flowing river and precipitate flight from it."[338]But the immediate gain can cause disasters in the lives of these poor people. Natural disasters can be dealt with as these people for a very long period of time have survived within nature. But changes brought in by modernity can cause havoc that these people cannot cope with as such disasters will be man-made and intentional.

Bashiam is more than just a figure who serves as the tribal community's spokesperson. Through him, Markandaya shows how modernization affects a marginalised character like Bashiam. He is a complex individual. His belief that modernity can result in positive benefits is primarily based on his marginal status and the uphill battle he has waged to sustain his survival within Indian society. Second, contemporary influences are to blame for his alienation from his own people. Now that modernity has forced people to adopt newer lifestyles while simultaneously dividing them from their ancestors, we can observe that someone like Bashiam is cut off from his own people. He is viewed as an outsider because of his job, which involves machines and modern equipments. He doesn't feel as though he belongs anywhere anymore. It is just a sense of non-attachment that engulfs him: "Bashiam's roots were attenuated: his homecomings were uneasy surface affairs."[339]

During her conversation with Bashiam, Helen makes the observation that the man's manner of speech is quite similar to that of her husband. Bashiam discusses his feeling of unity with the other members of the crew that work at the site. He believes that his strong

[338]Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 43.

[339]Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 44.

sense of team spirit aids him in overcoming the challenges that come with living a marginalised existence. The same dedication to working together as a team can be seen in the whites as well. This demonstrates that these men, regardless of the socioeconomic situation in which they find themselves, are able to take the same stance when confronted with ideas such as modernisation, teamwork, and development. Helen has not yet been won over to the idea that modernity will ultimately prevail, in contrast to the ease with which men may be persuaded of the benefits of modernity and progress. Women have roots that go much deeper into their territories and the ecology of their lands than men do. The construction of the new dam, which would result in the relocation of the indigenous people, does not concern Bashiam. He considers it to be essential and inescapable at this point. He has been indoctrinated to believe that the dam will improve people's lives and open up new opportunities. Because of his blindness, he is unable to recognise the fact that the relocation of the indigenous people is not an inescapable event. He believes that it is done for the dam's benefit. Helen explains to him that the decision was made so the cottage would have a view. Bashiam was oblivious to that fact. Development does this. It presents itself as obligatory, and unavoidable. The minds of individuals who are most susceptible to its influence are manipulated by it.

The fact that Bashiam is unable to see the truth infuriates her. During the intense argument that takes place between these two, one question emerges: why does it matter to Helen? There is also an additional question that arises with this one. Why does Bashiam not seem to care? What compels him to abandon his people? Why doesn't he raise any objections? Markandaya provides the response. It involves not just the present but also his past and his future as well. At the moment, he is someone who believes that machines are important and that development is necessary since Clinton and his guys have influenced him to think this way. The fact that he has suffered in the past both at the hands of a hostile

natural environment and at the hands of an unjust social setting has led to his acceptance of the paradigms of modernity. He considers the circumstances he is in at the moment to be preferable to those he has faced in the past. However, regardless of the circumstances, the poor population will continue to be the subject of dominance of those in positions of authority. Helen and the leader of the village both raise concerns about Bashiam's apparent openness to contemporary culture. Throughout the course of the book, Helen develops a strong connection to this mysterious character. During her talk with the chief of the village, she brings up issues that directly concern the local community. The words spoken by the village chief provide evidence that despite the fact that he may be a very ordinary village head, he nevertheless possesses the ability to comprehend the consequences that modernity has on their lives:"'You are guests in our country', he said with dignity. ' We like you to be comfortable so we adapt ourselves to your ways. Would you not', he asked with a shattering innocence, 'do the same for us in your country?'"[340]According to him the return of the white masters in the Indian village is going to cause a massive change in the lives of the poor: "A backward people, whose primeval ways had exasperated successive governments, monumental impediment in the path of progressive companies and administrations, even they felt the glancing blow of social change."[341]

On the surface, the change is not easily discernible. But as Helen travels across the country and observes its inhabitants, she begins to notice and comprehend the changes that have taken place. The people are having a harder time maintaining their traditional means of subsistence. She observes men who are presently unable to hunt or fish in the river because of deforestation and contamination of the water bodies. The fact that they are unable to perform their jobs in the factory is another source of distress. The headman, the tribal chief sees the

[340]Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 71.

[341]Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 71.

entrance of the whites very differently than Bashiam does. The dam, which represents an opportunity for Bashiam, represents for the tribe chief a merciless display of power. Establishing the model of growth and development is more important to the whites than their concern for the general populace. They lack both the understanding and the interest to comprehend how that model of advancement harms the lives of the poor. Resources from the third world, human poverty rates, and first world dominance are all woven into the intricate and lethal web of the newly formed concept of modernity. The web reaches far and broad across the globe. Everyone is affected by it. The tribal people who depend primarily on the preservation of the environment are likewise caught in the web. There isn't a way out. They take part in capitalist activities by contributing to the labour force. They are only seen as a resource that can be acquired with a minimal outlay according to the ideology of money-driven development. The tribal community loses its ability to survive independently as a result of the devastation of its ecosystem. The capitalist path must be chosen as the sole option. Helen is informed of the circumstances by the chief. Everyone has fallen under the spell of money: the fundamental force behind capitalism. The tribal chief emphasises it. He believes that modernization and the superficiality of urban life have also influenced the indigenous people. They have also developed materialistic avarice. He is most hurt by this:

> 'Can you hear them moaning?' His voice, a shrill bark, came surprisingly from a shrivelled larynx. 'No,' Helen said, squatting down beside him. 'I heard them in camp. Here it looks different.' 'It looks. It is not.' The chief was full of his disgust. 'They moan here too, they miss the money they have not had. Money, money. They are becoming as money-mad as you foreigners are.' 'It is a useful commodity.' 'Useful', the old man was roused. 'Useful you say. What for, I ask you: for that rubbish they buy from the camp shop? Tin cans and cardboard boots, and scented pigs' grease to plaster on their hair. For this they moan.'[342]

The leader of the tribe emphasises over and over again how important it is to get back to the fundamentals of tribal life. It is the only way for them to gain independence from the external

[342]Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 72.

forces. The chief believes they will never run out of food or fuel since they are so dependent on the forest for their survival. Despite the fact that they may be wealthy, he believes that their lives are inherently meaningless. However, a happier existence would result from living in harmony with nature. Helen was unable to comprehend how modernity was turning these people into money-grubbing individuals in addition to destroying their houses. When Helen tells the chief that as soon as the white people leave the country, the indigenous community will finally be able to live in peace. In response to this, the chief comments: "A peace full of moaning,' croaked the chief, whose voice was going, 'and pining for trash. But before that, they will learn what is real and mourn what is lost. A score or more before they bend the river. The Great Dam will take them; the man-eater will have its flesh.' He stopped, his voice had given out."[343]The struggles faced by the tribal community have a startlingly similar precedent in the more recent history of our nation. It brings to mind the Narmada Bachao Andolan, which was one of the most important environmental initiatives to emerge from India. Because of the dams that were built on the Narmada river, the fields that the farmers farmed were inundated with water. These farmers continue to oppose the encroachment on their fields, as well as the fact that they were not given proper rehabilitation.

This wise old man, the chief is able to observe how both the town and its inhabitants change over the course of time. According to him, modernity is a curse that ruins the lives of people who exist on the outskirts of society. Das, Helen's domestic help and a member of the local group, doesn't realise the far-reaching consequences of the dam-project. The disparity between these individuals hints at the reality that not everyone is capable of understanding what is going on. In spite of the fact that Das is a local, he forms a connection with the Clinton family. After working in the Clinton household for a significant amount of time, he starts to develop his own perspective on things. He thinks of Helen as a different master

[343]Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 72.

because she has never mistreated him in any way. In return, Das has complied with all of the white family traditions in order to be accepted into the family. In the end, Das matures into the ideal servant, but he is never considered a family. The advocacy that Das offers for the whites perplexes Helen. On the other side, Bashiam maintains a positive outlook towards the contemporary Establishment. He recognises the possibility. However, his embrace of modernity only serves to push him further away from his community. The irony is that these people will never be accepted into the white circle, and as a result, they will fall more and further behind in their community. This is something that the modern world does to people; it deprives them of their lands, their people, and also their capacity for sound judgement.

These marginal voices take a prominent place in these novels. The women authors present these characters as mouthpieces for the environment and for the underprivileged. These characters present their unique understanding of not only life but also of death. Their knowledge that is primarily gained from nature teaches them to worship nature as divine. To them the natural cycles reflect in the cycles of life too and that is why death for them means more than what it is to the whites. When we see that after a tragic incident at the dam site that kills a number of white men, it is the tribal woman who agrees to carry out rituals for the dead. Krishnan forbids even the rescue of the bodies as that could harm the construction. But Mackendrick wants to give them a proper burial. The bodies are rescued yet no one wants to attend to the bodies as they are distorted under the pressure of the concrete. It is finally a task left to the marginals to be carried out. Markandaya says it is their willingness to connect that directs them to help, to heal. The people who are closely connected to the land, nature, and the river have a different take on life and it is because of their faith, and their understanding of the natural cycle of life they have come to respect death as well. Death is meaningful to them regardless of the colour of the skin of the departed.

Bashiam's position in the middle raises many concerns –he belongs to an indigenous tribe but he is no longer an integral part of the community. On the other hand, though he has become moderately modern, has a fair knowledge of the machines and sometimes his expertise overshadows the expertise of the whites, he still is not fully accepted amongst the whites. He is given a shabby quarter where he can barely find the comforts of a home: "Tohis tribe, he was a man who walked alone, sprung from them but no longer belonging, a man who put shoes on his feet and worked machines, whose feelings and desires they could not fathom."[344]Bashiam's position at the periphery is time and again pointed out. The head man of the tribe saw him at the edge of the encampment looking like an "estranged animal."[345]

Bashiam's position in the middle is reflected in the kind of accommodation he is given by both the white masters and the tribe he belongs to. Bashiam's quarter is inhabitable, it suffocates him. And the hut that the tribal built for him is one as Markandaya says: "they planned it a little apart from theirs, out of consideration, straining their minds to think as he might. Out of consideration, too, they built differently; not bamboo and thatch, but a tin shack roofed with corrugated iron and sheets of plastic like the temporary shelter the contractor had hustled up for the first contingent of workers. This edifice they presented to Bashiam, with faint statements which they did not believe of its unworthiness for a man of his high status."[346]Bashiam's efforts to dismantle the house that tribals built for him are suggestive of his attitude towards modernity. He is pro-modern: "Bashiam did not trouble about their feelings. He had learnt what a bar to progress emotion could become."[347]

[344]Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 135.

[345]Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 135.

[346]Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 136.

[347]Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 136.

Conclusion:

These individuals who are on the margins of society contribute significantly to our comprehension of how power is exercised. This serves as a crucial component in our understanding of the workings of power because the devaluation of these people has been brought about by both the cultures inside these groups and the forces from the outside world. Characters like Puran in *The Folded Earth*, Hari in *The Village by the Sea* or Bashiam in *The Coffer Dams* and even Kenny in *Nectar in a Sieve* are all outsiders who occupy a space that is theoretically problematic. These outsiders create bridges between past and present, ancient and modern, east and the west and many other binaries. They make us think and reconsider many aspects within the peripheries of ecofeminism. Aspects like spiritual ecofeminism, eco-consciousness, effects of modernity and the definition of it as well. These characters create space where we can negotiate the fixities and boundaries of terms like modernity, culture and mostly eco-consciousness.

On one hand, we have a marginal character like Bashiam and on the other, there exists another marginal character who is the village chief, the head man of the tribe. He possesses greater insight than any of the other characters: "What he could not see, he sensed. He knew about the rain, and the rise of the river, each day accelerating; about the Englishwoman, and the plight of the lowlanders who had come up the hill on the trail of money. He saw the dust from the dams like ash on his tribesmen's faces, and the growing neglect of the village as more and more of his men were sucked in, to whirl like cogs around the restless core."[348]What Bashiam fails to notice, the old man is able to understand perfectly. There is no possibility that the impacts of modernity on the lives of those on the margins of society can be in any way beneficial. This individual is aware of the thoughts and deeds of the young

[348]Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 150.

men of his tribe who have chosen to participate in the job of constructing the dam for financial gain. And because the work is only available to men, the women and the children are the ones who will suffer the most because they will be unable to find a route out of their ever-deteriorating state of poverty. The natural world is being ruined, and as a result, their lives are becoming more challenging.

The voice of the village chief and the attention that is placed on it are crucial because they provide us with a more in-depth look at and comprehension of the problems that are faced by the marginal entities. He discusses how modernisation is continuously having an impact not only on people and the natural world but also on every other aspect of life. These kinds of characters can be found in the women authors' other works as well. The vast majority of those male characters who are concerned about the environment, such as Diwan Sahib from *The Folded Earth* and Sayeed Ali from *Village by the Sea*, are not members of the marginal population. Their observations are essential because they contribute to our understanding of the effects that development has on the lives of non-human entities as well as on humans. But when a character like the chief man of the tribe shares his ideas and insights, it undeniably has a bigger weight because they have witnessed their people's suffering firsthand. Because of their indigenous knowledge, he is able to gain a more in-depth understanding of how nature functions and of the ways in which even a small alteration in the natural world can have a terrible impact on the lives of many people who live on the margins of society. The chief and the other characters in the texts have a pessimistic view of modernity and believe that the destructive aspects of modernity are inevitable consequences of its exploitative nature.

The village headman and Helen are two different people who belong to two different communities but they share one thing in common- their eco-consciousness, their awareness that the process of modernisation can ruin things to such extent that there may not be any

turning back, irrecoverable damage can result from mindless destruction of nature. And when nature is disturbed and exploited many lives specially those that are attached to it get damaged and altered for the worse. Helen and the headman are on the same footing here. And is this passage we get a picture of how the quiet mountain village has been ravaged by 'progress' and 'modernity':

> Helen, distressed, saw with the headman's eyes the visible deterioration: the uprooted palings lying where they had fallen in muddy troughs of their own creation, the unfilled subsidence craters left by intensified blasting, the ragged come-apart thatching. In a matter of weeks the damage was plain, a perpetuating circle that gained momentum as the dams drained men from the tribe. She could not, however, speak of it either to her husband, or to Mackendrick, or even to Bashiam , recognizing there was nothing to be done. All of them were bound, shackled between a modern juggernaut and time, the ancient enemy armed with teeth and a new ferocity.[349]

People with sensitive minds, like Helen, and the readers both benefit from the marginal characters' ability to provide a deeper comprehension of the situation. They are profoundly in tune with their environment, and they are impacted by changes that occur in their surroundings. They have an intellectual comprehension of the devastation that modernisation causes to the natural world. The link, however, extends much further when it comes to the character of Puran, or the chief of the tribe. Love, tradition, and instinct all contribute to the formation of their understanding. Therefore, the function of the marginals becomes vital in the construction of a comprehensive formation of Indian ecofeminism.

There are influential individuals who decide what it means to be 'civilised' and what it means to be 'modern'. Their concept of 'modernity' encourages them to look down their noses at people who are not like them, who come from various cultures and communities. These communities are pushed to the margins, and in the name of modernity, they are exploited, subjugated, and ultimately eradicated. The modern era has resulted in the exploitation of every marginal entity, including nature. The white race has conquered the

[349]Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 151.

untouched nature that is home to the tribal people who revere it and depend on it for their livelihoods. The erroneous concept of modernity can be seen to be quite damaging. The voices of these underrepresented entities are amplified through Markandaya's narratives. The marginalised are put under immense pressure by the system, which is mostly controlled by a group of powerful men who believe that any act of violence committed against the marginalised is acceptable as long as it benefits them financially. Gadgil and Guha write: "This is a system in which the interest for the huge numbers of ecosystem people and ecological refugees can be largely ignored. The omnivores can capture resources by using the state apparatus, while the cost of the resource capture on to the rest of the population. This permits the system to tolerate massive environmental degradation and to use resources in an exceedingly inefficient manner.[350]

[350]Gadgil and Guha,*Ecology and Equity,* 45.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Ecofeminism is a way of critical thinking that originated in the Western world. Its primary focus is on investigating the links that exist between women and nature. Since the beginning of time, women have been compared to the forces of nature since both nature and women are considered as giving and self-sacrificing creatures. In addition to this, both the natural world and women are considered to be sources of life. This equation, however, has been questioned in a number of different ways within ecofeminist thought. They think that women and nature have many things in common, but those things cannot be defined in simple terms. There are a variety of ways in which ecofeminists themselves identify the basis for their position. We can summarize them in the following manner:

1. Spiritual Connection
2. Cultural Connection
3. Material Connection
4. Historical Connection

Some find a special spiritual bond between them. Western ecofeminists mostly believe that nature and women share a "Feminine Principal"[351]. This has been termed as a spiritual connection between them. They believe that if we could find this divine "Feminine Principal" within nature or begin to see nature as a living spiritual being we can never harm it. They talk about regenerating that spiritual conception within nature which is feminine in nature. Secondly, some believe that from the inception of modernity, man has created this binary of culture-nature.[352] Nature is now perceived as an obstacle in his way to establish himself as

[351] Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge , 1993), 9.

[352] Karen J. Warren, *Ecofminism: Women, Nature and Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1970), 87.

superior. Thus nature becomes an object to control, to dominate. And on the other hand women too in cultures are seen as inferior to men. Their shared history of oppression is a thread that connects them. Thirdly, many believe that women work within nature more intimately than men. In countries like India, women depend on nature more closely for their survival and that is why when nature is affected their lives are affected too.[353] This has been termed as the material bond between them. These theoretical approaches when applied to literature many other aspects emerge that help to broaden the peripheries of Ecofeminism itself. We begin to find out that the connection shared by women and nature is a complex and dynamic thing. In the texts of Indian women authors, we get an array of such complex relationships between women and nature. This helps us to better understand how women and nature connect in a third world country.

When ecofeminist theory is applied to the literature written by Indian women authors, many other dimensions, in addition to a revitalised understanding of how women and nature link, particularly in the third world, become apparent. When the theory's boundaries are expanded, we start to see minute details that were previously not apparent in our comprehension of the theory. The following statement can be used to summarise these new dimensions:

1. The bond shared by women and nature is not a homogeneous one.
2. Not all women are capable of developing a strong association with nature and can foresee the dangers of modernity.
3. Men can be equally eco-conscious.
4. People of position and power can sometimes be sympathetic to the sufferers and have a vision of an alternative worldview.

[353] Bina Agarwal, "The Gender and Environment Debate: Lessons from India," *Feminist Studies* 18, no.1 (Spring 1992): www.jstor.org/stable/ 3178217

5. A different perspective on modernity.
6. Third world cultures can be equally exploitative for the marginalised sections.

These points are the contributions offered by women authors like Markandaya, Desai and Roy in broadening the peripheries of mainstream Ecofeminist theory. A thorough consideration of these topics will reveal that the novels written by these female authors not only contain crucial ecofeminist elements but also help to fill in gaps in the theory itself.

1. The bond shared by women and nature is not a homogeneous one:

Ecofeminists, particularly those with a Western background, occasionally assert that the third world has not been impacted by the outward development paradigm or the Western conception of modernity. Second, women in cultures of the Third World form strong bonds with nature. Thirdly, there are only two ways to describe the nature of this bond: spiritually or materially. The work of female authors encourages us to reconsider the theoretical underpinnings of ecofeminism and demonstrates that there cannot exist a singular, uniform relationship between women and Third World nature. Multiple bonds may exist. These narratives have strong female leads. These characters come from various social classes, therefore the connections they have with one another are never uniform. Materialist ecofeminism holds that a woman's position in society affects how she feels about the environment.[354] The form of relationships ends up being varied because these women are a part of various social contexts. As a result, there isn't a single connection or coherent bond that can be defined in precise and consistent terms. However, it would be incorrect to claim that there is no connecting factor among these various, multifaceted links. The one thing that

[354] Bina Agarwal, "The Gender and Environment Debate: Lessons from India," *Feminist Studies* 18, no.1 (Spring 1992): www.jstor.org/stable/ 3178217

genuinely ties women and the environment together is the capitalist patriarchy's attitude that sees both as inferior and therefore can be used as resources.[355]

When we speak of Indian Ecofeminism we need to see that the connections shared by women with nature cannot be defined in simple terms. That connection can be purely spiritual and can be material and most interestingly can be both at the same time. In the case of Rukmani, in *Nectar in a Sieve* (2007), we see that Rukmani's social position is such that she needs to work in close proximity with nature. Her material benefit from nature forges a connection. But to stop there would be incorrect since we quickly recognise that her connection to nature is deeper than a just material one. Rukmani's inner life is reflected in nature. Her successes and setbacks are all, in some ways, related to nature. She finds expression in nature as she matures into a woman, changes into a mother, and battles for survival. The presentation of a unique interaction between a woman and her surroundings in Markandaya can serve as a model for most Third World women who are capable of interacting with nature. These female novelists demonstrate that it is not always feasible to categorically describe the relationship. Women and their bond with the natural world is multifaceted and subject to change. This also raises questions of cultural relativism.

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, we see that Rukmani is critical of the development project, the tannery in her village. She refuses to accept these foreign intruders in her land. She could foresee what the future holds for her and her children if the project is established and carried out in her village. Time and again Rukmani protests against this industry. But many in her village are supportive of this project as they see opportunities to work, to earn, to make businesses, etc. But what they fail to see is that this new addition in the village will destroy their own ways of life that used to sustain them. It will destroy the nature on which the lives

[355] Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2010), 64.

of the countless village people depend. It will pollute the land and the waters. It will turn their ancient knowledge of farming useless and turn them into mere factory workers. Nothing will be under their control. They will be governed by business. The circumstances are dire.

Rukmani has a special bond with nature. Her well being and the well being of her family depend on nature and she had that understanding that if nature is destroyed her life would be affected in the worst possible ways. Ecofeminists would say that it is her cultural position that creates this special bond. Materialist ecofeminists would say that as nature provides the essentials, she is so bothered by this changes that are taking place in her village and would invariably disrupts the balance. However, not all the women in the novel share her understanding. A significant character is Kunthi. Kunthi's social, cultural position is similar to Rukmani but her reactions are different than that of Rukmani. Kunthi says: "'You are a queer being,' Kunthi said, her brows flaring away from her eyes. 'Are you not glad that our village is no longer a clump of huts but a small town? Soon there will be shops and tea stalls, and even a bioscope, such as I have been to before I was married. You will see.'"[356]To this Rukmani says: "'No doubt I will.' I said. 'It will not gladden me. Already my children hold their noses when they go by, and all is shouting and disturbance and crowds wherever you go. Even the birds have forgotten to sing, or else their calls are lost to us.'"[357]The difference in responses shows that not all women belonging to a definite culture would connect to nature in a deeper, meaningful way. Many women subscribe to male patriarchal views like Amu in *The Folded Earth* (2011) and Kunthi in *Nectar in a Sieve*. This is a deviation from the main theoretical framework of ecofeminism.

As in *Nectar in a Sieve,* we see that women belonging to the same social background could not share a similar bond, in *Fire on the Mountain* (2015) the two most important

[356] Kamala Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve* (Navi Mumbai: Penguin Books, 2009), 31.

[357] Kamala Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve,* 31.

female characters: Nanda and Raka also share different connections to nature. Raka is Nanda's great-granddaughter. Nanda's past life in the luxurious household of her husband has left her so exhausted that now all she wants is to be left alone in nature. She has been forced to live a life that her father and later her husband have decided for her. She has been playing the role of a wife, of mother and of a provider. She no longer wants that. Her exploitation in the hands of patriarchy creates the bond that now she shares with nature. But for Raka the situation is different. Raka connects to nature instinctively. She is an explorer, a free soul.

Maya, Charu, Rukmani, Nanda, Raka, Helen- these women belong to different social positions and these women relate to nature differently. Maya belongs to the city and yet her longing to go into nature cannot be denied. Her city-based education, her urban upbringing make her even more attached to nature which promises freedom and peace. Maya's understanding of the bond shared by humans and nature makes her an exceptional character. Charu also develops a bond with nature yet it is different from Maya's. Maya is more analytical, her understanding depends on her reasoning. Charu's bond is more spiritual. She could connect more deeply. Rukmani too belongs to the rural world. Compared to any other female character in any of these works, her bond is both deeper and more similar to Charu. She has both spiritual and practical connections. She is able to predict the perils that would befall them if modernism invades her community. The Vice Chancellor's wife, Nanda, communicates on a different level. She finds comfort and the much-needed tranquillity in the rocky, untamed, and desolate landscape. Her weary mind finds solace in the peace of nature. She doesn't look for excitement the way her great-granddaughter Raka does. Nanda and her connection to nature serve as a counterpoint to Raka's affinity with nature. Raka is a youthful, energetic person. Her favourite pastime is exploring the outdoors and uncovering hidden treasures. She has dirt and soil all over her hands and feet, and the sharp tangles of plants and

shrubs have scratched her arms and legs. She enjoys the brightness and vibrancy of nature, unlike Nanda. Raka and Maya both have a close connection to nature despite having grown up in cities. Like Maya, she is able to recognise the hazards of civilization and how it devastates the environment.

Raka and Nanda, her great-grandmother, are both members of the affluent class in society. Despite having similar backgrounds, they each have a unique connection to nature. Therefore, it would be incorrect to presume that women in a given social position share a comparable link with nature. Another error made frequently by Western ecofeminist critics is to describe the nature of this link as entirely spiritual or solely material. *The Village by the Sea* (2015) by Anita Desai opens with a scene that prompts us to re-evaluate a lot of our preconceived notions about ecofeminism. This book takes place in an Indian village. Because of their poverty, the people's top priority is to provide for their families and themselves. The world of *The Village by the Sea* is very different from the world of Nanda and Raka. These are simple folks, and Lila and Hari's story revolves around their struggle to make a living. But despite this, these people also have a connection to nature that is intuitive. Lila and Hari have strong ties to nature, much like Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve*. Their existence is closely entwined with nature. As Lila descends into the water, she comes across a group of rocks that the locals regard as sacred. With little flowers as offerings, the women worship the rocks. Additionally, there is no place for a purohit, who is perceived by society to be entitled to worship any deity. The ritual's simplicity conveys its importance. Her relationship with nature is unique to her. Without the assistance of anything else or another person, they establish a spiritual connection. The whole morning ritual of worshipping nature is significant for our understanding of how in India, nature can have multiple implications. Desai by presenting the aspect of spiritual connection with nature makes us realise that there is more to nature- woman connection besides just the material interest. And yet through her story she

also projects that nature is the ultimate source of their survival, a materialist approach. Both the connections can exist all at once without a contradiction – this is something ecofeminist thinkers seldom address.

2. Not all women are capable of developing a strong association with nature and can foresee the dangers of modernity:

The female characters in all these novels do not always share a special bond with nature. It is not always a matter of only occupation, livelihood, culture or gender. Many never develop a closer connection but some do share a special bond regardless of their position in the social ladder, regardless of race. Helen is a fine example of that. She belongs to the white British race and yet shows remarkable ability to connect to the local people, understand their suffering and perceive their capability when it comes to a peaceful living within nature. Karla Armbruster focuses on a problem that may occur when women are connected with nature unquestioningly. What she means is that an unquestioning and simplified idea of a connection between women and nature can give rise to essentialism- the risk of reemphasising the existing and private power equations. She writes:

> Within ecofeminism, an unproblematized focus on women's connection with nature can actually reinforce the "master" ideologies of dualism and hierarchy by constructing yet another dualism: an uncomplicated opposition between women's perceived unity with nature and male-associated culture's alienation from it. On the other hand an unbalanced emphasis on differences in gender, race, species or other aspect of identity can deny the complexity of human and natural identities and lead to the hierarchical ranking of oppression on the basis of importance or causality.[358]

The problem of essentialism is a serious one as many critics of ecofeminism have come up with the problem when they tried to demerit the theory of ecofeminism. Yet this particular problem is solved by the women authors. They offer a perspective that questions

[358]Karla Armbruster, "Buffalo Gals, Won't you come out tonight," in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy,* ed. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (Chicago: University of Illinois Press: 1998), 98.

the conceptions that are culturally constructed about human identity with non-human nature instead of an unproblematised vision of continuity or difference. The women characters in the novels share a complex bond with nature. The bond is not homogenous and simplistic, it is multidimensional and complex. These authors never essentialize the connections. These writers consistently go beyond narrow, biological connections between women and nature in their works. Critics such as Ynestra King and Susan Griffin both believe that the shared history of oppression connects them (women and nature) rather than any biological or essential identity. It should be mentioned that these authors have also critiqued other dominant dualisms such as mind-soul or intellect-emotion by representing soulful, emotional attachment of characters both male and female with non-human nature. This further broadens the peripheries of ecofeminism.

Our analysis of numerous women characters and their relationships with nature in all of these works supports the ecofeminist notion that there is a complex tie between women and nature. These female novelists investigate the connection between women and the natural world. But throughout this investigation, they also provided us with several examples of how many women characters struggle to connect with nature or feel empathy for other female characters who struggle because modernization has destroyed their habitat and taken away their means of subsistence. These women represent patriarchy. They promote child marriage, reject female education, and are blind to the effects of the radical modernization of their own country. Charu's grandmother in *The Folded Earth*, Rukmani's friend Kunthi in *Nectar In a Seive* , Mille in *The Coffer Dam* (2008) are those women characters who subscribe to the dominant ideology of control and domination. The female authors challenge the ecofeminist idea that women in the Third World have identical connections to nature. Even within the Third World, it is impossible to characterise the relationship between women and nature in uniform terms. There will inevitably be some exceptions. In this instance, the female

novelists bring something fresh and current to the pre-existing theoretical framework. By doing this, they contribute to the development of an Indian-specific theory. Charu's grandmother says to Maya in *The Folded Earth* when she comes to investigate the reasons of Charu's absence from school: "'Why?' Ama said, narrowing her eyes. 'I never learnt to read a word, and has it been a problem for me?'Before I could argue, she appeared to reconsider and said, 'No, it's a good thing. She won't be as helpless as her poor dead mother. She won't let a man get away with treating her badly. But don't teach her too much. Girls who study too much are no good for anything- she won't get a husband and she'll have all sorts of silly ideas about herself.'"[359]The grandmother of Charu fails to comprehend the significance of a woman's education. The culture itself promotes the idea that males are superior to women, and that any behaviour that deviates from the norms of the culture is wrong. The General's views on education, particularly for girls, are echoed by Charu's grandmother. A similar character we find in *Nectar in a Sieve*: Rukmani's mother. We see that before marriage she was taught to read and write primarily by her father. But her mother was against Rukmani's education. These characters are members of a larger culture that views women and girls as resources to be used for personal gain.

The character of Linda in Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* (2008) serves as an antithesis to the character of Helen. Both belong to the same social position yet they exhibit different attitudes to the issues concerning local people, their displacement, the natural degradation caused by the dam. Thus what emerges is that the women authors are not taking a blind route when they speak of the bond between women and nature. By representing these exceptions such as Kunthi in *Nectar in a Sieve*, Nanda in *Fire on the Mountain*, Linda in *The Coffer Dams*, Charu's mother in *The Folded Earth*, the women authors have made us rethink the ecofeminist standpoint that women and nature connect unquestioningly. Vera Norwood in

[359]Anuradha Roy, *The Folded Earth* (Gurgaon: Hachette India, 2011), 119.

her book *Made from This Earth: American Women and Nature* (1993) writes: "some have cast women along with nature, as an oppressed class that did not participate in the masculine agenda of domination."[360]But the women authors have dismantled the idea of "oppressed class" where nature and women have been unquestioningly grouped under one term: "the oppressed class". These women authors have presented female characters that are living in close proximity with nature. Yet share no bond as such. These women characters look at nature as an inanimate resource. Some participate in the dominant ideologies that subvert nature. An oversimplified explanation of women and nature bond causes problem. Donna Haraway shares a similar view: "We cannot claim innocence from practising such domination...Innocence, and the corollary insistence on victimhood as the only ground for insight has done enough damage," [361]

The problem is that many ecofeminist critics fail to see the problem when they assign cultural positions to women and nature. They think that as both are culturally marginalised so both are connected. Women authors add a dimension to this claim of connection between women and nature. The wide range of characters both male and female complicates this assumption that women and nature connect unquestioningly. Women too participate in the ideological and economic forces that dominate non-human nature and benefit from it.

3. Men can be equally eco-conscious:

The character of Diwan Sahib in the novel *The Folded Earth* is an exceptional male character. Diwan Sahib shares a close bond with nature. The essence of his association with nature is different from other man-nature bonds portrayed in the novel. He is an urban

[360] Vera Norwood, *Made from This Earth: American Women and Nature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993) 277.

[361] Donna Haraway and J. Simians, *Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge. 1991), 157.

educated man, well read, well established and yet his relationship is marked by a unique understanding of the delicate balance within nature and the effects of dismantling that harmony. His understanding is caused by his love for nature, his long association with it, his intellect and his vision. That's why the character of Diwam Sahib comes across as a unique creation of Anuradha Roy. We begin to see beyond the peripheries of ecofeminist theory at large. Other dimensions are added to an already existing discipline that strives to explore human relationships with nature. For Maya, Diwan Sahib is like a loving father that she never had. She says, "But his eyes were kind and the care with which he took each thorn out made me think, for the first time since Michel's death, that I might one day feel less alone."[362]

The care and involvement that Diwan Sahib is able to reflect is exceptional. The other two male characters in Maya's life, Michel and Veer both share bonds with nature but those are fundamentally different from Diwan Sahib's association. For Michel and Veer it is more like conquering nature, exploring it for the joy and excitement it offers. There is no deeper connection that directs one to preserve nature and consider its sanctity and purity. Diwan Sahib and Puran, a social outcast of the novel show love for nature and they share a bond that can only be explained in terms of spirituality. It is because of that understanding that Diwan sahib could fathom the meaning of Puran's closeness with nature, specially the orphan fawn he saves. Only Diwan Sahib could see Puran's affinity for the poor animal as a blessing, he is a unique being and for Diwan Sahib, he is the sanest of all men. He could also evaluate man's position when it comes to problems of ecological degradation, deforestation, and delicate bio-diversity in a mountain village like Ranikhet. In the last paragraph of chapter 12, we get a glimpse into Diwan Sahibs mental frame, how conscious he is, how deeply involved is his association with nature and each of its inhabitants:

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[362]Anuradha Roy, *The Folded Earth* (Gurgaon: Hachette India, 2011), 72.

> Until humans came and made anthills out of these mountains, Diwan Sahib was saying, looking up at the langurs, the land had belonged to these monkeys, and to barking deer, nilgai, tiger, barasingha, leopards, jackles, the great horned owl, and even to cheetahs and lions. The archaeology of the wilderness consisted of these lost animals, not of the ruined walls, terracotta amulets, and potsherds. Only now and then did we catch a glimpse of the distant past of our forests, when that shadow of a barasingha's horns flitted through the denser woods, or when a leopard coughed at night. It was extremely rare, though not unknown for wild animals to trust human beings, Diwan Sahib said. Why should they, when we have destroyed their world? Puran's affinity to animals was a lost treasure.[363]

Diwan Sahib is clearly a person with deep sense of eco-consciousness. The memory of the lost past of the region is very dear to him and the present condition of the same region clearly is disturbing to him. Much like Charu and Puran, Diwan Sahib too advocates the rights of animals within the forests which is their natural habitat. Diwan Sahib is also aware of the possibility of a human-animal connection that he has witnessed before. A peaceful coexistence is possible and Puran is the finest example of that. But in modern world we have come to see animals as resources to be exploited. And rarely one speaks of their rights which are as important as the rights of a human being. Diwan Sahib is unlike other male character of the novel who belong to the upper strata of the society. Others view the land as a means to generate profit and to increase the profits they are willing to destroy the serenity and the harmony of the place.

Diwan Sahib is a character that stands as a sharp contrast to the other male characters of the novel- the General, the Brigadier and Mr. Chauhan. Though their social class is similar Diwan Sahib differs from them in number of ways: firstly, in his idea of progress and development he is different. He believes in keeping the balance of fragile mountain ecology unaffected by the so called modernisation. Secondly, his understanding of local community and their well being makes him a different character. He sympathises with the locals specially those whose lives get altered if nature is harmed. Thirdly, his foresight: he could observe the

[363] Roy, *The Folded Earth*, 74.

slow change that is engulfing the mountain land. The dwindling biodiversity, the lack of fresh water, the ever decreasing forest line all are effects of modernity. He knows if this keeps on going the remaining untouched beauty of the place will disappear in no time:

> I am going to tell them that they must put their ears to the earth and rocks and hear them breath .Because here in Ranikhet the rocks do breath. I am going to tell them to listen for one second on their way through the woods to their school for the sound of the sap rising through the trees; to spent one day painting the snow peaks they never bother to look at. They are like people born rich who don't understand what money is until it disappears.[364]

The novelists do not only give us instances where modernity has destroyed peaceful existence of beings that includes the destruction of nature and the lives of those who are connected to nature, they also direct our attention to the analysis of the position of men and women in this power game a bit more carefully. They do not want us to equate always without judgement man with the destroyer and woman with the preserver. These novelists make us rethink their positions. In case like Diwan Sahib and Puran in *The Folded Earth* we get male characters who are deeply eco-conscious and is aware of the fact that the land is being changed, the wild nature is to be destroyed and the bio diversity is to disappear all in the name of modernity and progress. They are also aware of the consequences of the change. Along with the damage in natural world the human world is also going to be affected as both are closely linked with each other. Many women characters in these novels do not always show such deep understanding of man and nature connect as much as these male characters do.

It is because of this involvement with nature that enables Diwan Sahib to foresee the future of the mountain village if projects of progress set foot in there. The tiny alpine community would no longer be able to preserve its natural environment. Trees will be taken down, industries will be built, and massive structures will be constructed. Powerful and

[364] Roy, *The Folded Earth*, 168.

wealthy individuals would benefit from progress, but Charu, Ama, Puran, and wild creatures would suffer losses. Even if the village is transformed into a modern city, the situation of these excluded groups will not alter. In Chapter 10, Diwan Sahib expresses his concerns about the country's expanding changes and foresees a gloomy future. In the chapter, Diwan Sahib is asked to attend a programme at the school. He is well-liked by kids because he used to perform animal sounds. But now that so much has changed in the mountainous region, so much has evolved, he is unable to entertain the youngsters, who are the most vulnerable group of people and who would suffer the most if modernization were to invade the area. Diwan Sahib discusses the woodlands and how dense they are. He discusses the skies, where Golden Eagles previously flew, but they no longer do so: "But no animal comes to that spur now. There are trucks that come and go, the entrance to the spur is piled high with logs from trees that have been cut from the forests all around. Have you ever heard the sound of a tree being cut with saws- coming apart at the trunk and failing?"[365]To construct dwellings for the bureaucrats, trees are taken down. The trees are the oldest in the area and the golden eagles' habitat. Diwan Sahib laments the removal of the trees, saying: "Nobody knows where the eagles went when their trees were felled. That is the forest now- it is a park, it is what is called a resource, factory. It belongs neither to the people who owned it before , nor to the animals and plants that lived in it."[366]

Diwan Sahib's awareness of the changing natural world is a crucial element in our assessment of the distinctive contribution of female novelists to the ecofeminist perspective. The theory of ecofeminism does not take into account the position of man as an eco-aware entity. But in this case, we get a remarkable male character who is just as intensely interested as Charu or Maya. Characters like Chrau's grandmother Ama and Maya's school principal,

[365]Roy, *The Folded earth*, 177.

[366]Roy, *The Folded earth*, 178.

Miss Wilson have absolutely no connection to nature. Because of this, Miss Wilson is quite upset when Diwan Sahib declines to imitate animal sounds at the end of the programme at the school: "What's all this nonsense? When we call him for a purpose and make so many arrangements! He should stick to the purpose. This is not done."[367]Her disappointment comes from her inability to judge and consider what Diwan Sahib says.

Women writers have crafted female characters who have a strong understanding of ecology and the significance of preserving the ecological balance. However, there are equally compelling male characters who also care about the environment. Such a person shows up in Desai's *The Village by the Sea* (2015). The individual is depicted as a city resident with an urban education and sympathies for the underprivileged. To hear this man talk on a stage, Hari travels there. Sayyid Ali is his name. He places a strong focus on defending nature against rapacious business enterprises and damaging political initiatives. Hari is perplexed to see a city man discussing matters that will have an impact on the lives of underprivileged peasants. The man is aware of how industries affect nature and all of its inhabitants. The man realises that these development initiatives will have an impact on many people's lives, both in villages and in cities, even though he does not live in a village and his life won't be instantly changed as a result of the chemical industry. He also discusses the ocean and how delicate and vulnerable its ecosystem is. He is aware that the sea provides the villagers means of subsistence. According to him, the chemical factory will undoubtedly contaminate the land and the sea, which will have an impact on the marine life that is crucial to the survival of the villagers. Dust, sulfur dioxide, ammonia, and other dangerous compounds will destroy the land, the air, and the water supplies. The factory will be constructed, but everyone will suffer as a result of such damaging development initiatives.

[367]Roy, *The Folded earth*, 178.

He also makes the argument that farmers and fishermen will be compelled to leave their villages and seek employment in the city once the water and the land have been thoroughly polluted. But living in a metropolis is not simple. For the underprivileged locals, it is hostile and foreign to them. For the majority of people, the dream of finding employment with reasonable pay and leading a comfortable life would always remain a fantasy. When he visits Thul in the book, we learn more about him. After hearing him speak in Bombay, we discovered how unique he is compared to the majority of males in upper-class metropolitan culture. He has strong environmental values. He feels sorry for the locals whose lives will be changed by the factory. We now get to witness a different aspect of this man when we encounter him in Thul. He reveals himself to be a man who is intensely concerned about the local flora and animals, much like Diwan Sahib in Roy's *The Folded Earth*. He is a bird watcher, a man deeply in love with nature. Such a man is a rare sight in the village and many of the villagers are amused to see Sayyid Ali getting lost in the beauty of nature.

He initially runs across Hari in the city, and then they meet in his town of Thul. This time, Hari gains some crucial knowledge from him. He gains an appreciation for how lovely nature is. Hari's eyes were shielded from the mysteries and beauty of the world, but now he is starting to appreciate how amazing nature is with its trees and flowers, lands and waterways, creatures and birds. He learns about the threats to nature if the factory opens thanks to Sayyid Ali. Desai therefore forces Hari to adjust to new lifestyles while simultaneously educating him on the negative aspects of modernity. Both knowledge of the necessity of maintaining the sacredness of nature and the ability to adapt to change are important. Desai does not end on a conclusive note since she is not taking sides. The goal is to make a space where we can think of solutions. There is another similar character in Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams*. It is the character of the village headman, the chief of the local tribe. This old and wise man could see more than the other characters in the novel. Markandaya writes: "In the settlement by the river the headman silently contemplated the season. He could no longer sit

in the open, where the sharp wind sliced at his bare shoulder blades; but he dug himself in at the entrance to his hut, in a hollow lined and rounded to fit his haunches. From here he could see, despite the tears that spurted from his eyes at each onslaught of wind and grit; and he saw a good deal more than most people looking at those milk-blue old man's eyes could credit."[368]

Male characters like Diwan Sahib in *The Folded Earth* or Kenny in *Nectar in a Sieve* and this village headman of *The Coffer Dams*- all share a bond with nature that is shaped by a deeper understanding of nature-human interrelations. They know that modernization based on borrowed ideas of Western model is going to destroy the balance and harmony within nature, sooner or later. These characters play a significant role in broadening our perspectives when it comes to the understanding of nature-human connection. They belong to different social positions and communities, they are of different races and classes, yet what connects them is their eco-consciousness.

4. People of position and power can sometimes be sympathetic to the sufferers and have a vision of an alternative worldview:

In the majority of the novels I'm working on, people in positions of authority are portrayed as manipulating. They are the flag bearers of modernity. To modernise lands and its inhabitants, they openly exploit both nature and people. There is, however, another side to the story. Numerous authors of novels have also included characters from the upper class. Although they are fortunate because of their social positions, they do not always consider oppressing others to prove their superiority. These people have extraordinary personalities and are deeply affected by the suffering of the underprivileged. They actively participate in their fights for justice and equality. Some of them are white men and women, while others are urban educated residents of cities. These kinds of personalities are typically portrayed as

[368]Markandaya, *The Coffer Dams*, 150.

embracing the Western notions of progress and development. These, however, are unique. Kenny is such an extraordinary character in *Nectar in a Sieve*. White man Kenny is a doctor who repeatedly appears in the book before abruptly disappearing. Although Kamala Markandaya doesn't exactly explain how these two characters meet in the book, we get the impression that they have a close bond. Kenny has a great deal of empathy with Rukmani and her difficulties. When she is in trouble, Kenny stands by her side, helping her get through the difficult times. We learn nothing about his family or his relationships with others and of his own sort.

Rukmani is the one who first informs us of him. Rukmani struggled to conceive, but with Kenny's assistance, she was finally able to give birth to five healthy children. For the first time, a white guy without prejudice intervenes to assist a local village woman. The conversation between Rukmani and Kenny shows how grateful she is to this white man: "'My lord, my benefactor,' I cried. ' Many a time I have longed to see you. Now at last, you come,' and I bent down to kiss his feet, shot as they were in leather shoes. He withdrew them quickly and told me to get u. 'I am not a benefactor,' he said, 'nor a lord. What ails you?''You are my benefactor,' I said stoutly. 'Have I not five sons to prove it?'"[369]

After that, Kenny is mentioned numerous times. He always makes it a point to meet Rukmani and her kids when he visits the hamlet. He shows Rukmani and her family a lot of affection and genuine concern by bringing them snacks. Kenny is the one who advises her to continue to her traditional means of survival rather than relying, like others, on the tannery when the natural calamity occurs. Despite being a white man himself, it is obvious that Kenny has different opinions about the development plan. We learn of Kenny's plans to construct a hospital in the community later on in the book. He employs Rukmani's son Selvam and daughter Ira in the making of the hospital. The hospital presents a different idea

[369]Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, 34.

of modernity. It does not necessarily subjugate others and works for all equally. The hospital proves to be a blessing for Rukmani as it is for the hospital that her son Selvam and Ira decide to stay in the village. Without it perhaps all her ties to the village would have been lost forever. Kenny even helped Murugan, Rukmani's son to get a job in the city too.

Thus, Kenny has a significant influence on both the story's plot and Rukmani's life. This figure challenges the notion of white supremacy as promoted by ecofeminists. The subject of race is complex. The complexity is increased with Helen, a figure from *The Coffer Dams* by Kamala Markandaya. She is the spouse of the project manager. To tame a river, Clinton travels to this town in southern India. Environmental damage and instability in the lives of various indigenous people are constant effects of the project's development phase. The occupants are required to leave their homes. These aren't just any lands to them; these are the places where they keep ties to their ancestry and gods. Helen is upset about the people being moved against their will. No one else reacts as passionately as she does, regardless of race or social level. She queries why the action was taken. She demonstrates an amazing capacity to connect with others. She actually feels for them. She believes that modernity is being applied incorrectly. Even if their marriage suffers as a result of her involvement with the locals, she won't accept the injustices done to the native population. She even quits the comforts of her house in an effort to connect and understand the locals, spending days living in close quarters with the natives. She is finally able to access the inner sanctum of the tribe with Bashiam's assistance. She even forges a unique kinship with Bashiam as a result of her interactions with them. The analysis of Helen reveals that she breaks down cultural barriers and starts looking for truths. Her investigation helps people to comprehend the power dynamics that underlie the dominant and subordinate relationship equations. Her persona evolves as one who is aware of other people's suffering, not just as a white woman from a wealthy community.

5. A different perspective on modernity:

These texts are criticisms of modernity. Modernity destroys nature, ruins lives that are closely tied up with nature. All these texts are based in India in different time periods. The writers of these works have consistently expressed scepticism towards modernity, particularly modernity that has its roots in the Western, European paradigm of development. Without taking into account the differences between Western and Eastern cultures and natures, we have embraced a foreign concept and attempted to make our country into a developing one. We failed to consider the issues that can result from development programmes. The unavoidable outcomes of poorly executed initiatives that we refer to as developmental include the devastation of nature, the disruption of many people's lives, the formation of cities, displacements, and the annihilation of indigenous tribes. The novels highlight each of these challenges. But the female novelists also help us understand that it would be incorrect to draw strict distinctions and generalisations. The nation itself is characterised by diversity, individuality, and multidimensionality. So, even the philosophy of modernity and development cannot be utilised in this situation because it is built on rigid rules.

In *Nectar in a Sieve* Kamala Markandaya presents an Indian village where development has been introduced in the form of a tannery. Much of Rukmani's ill fate is the result of the factory yet she admits that the factory can't be blamed for everything. She says: "Yet I must be honest, as my husband and sons have always been: the tannery cannot be blamed for every misfortune we suffered. Tannery or not, the land might have been taken from us. It had never belonged to us, we had never proposed to the extent where we could buy, and Nathan, himself the son of a landless man, had inherited nothing."[370]Here in these lines Rukmani explains why she turns out to be the worst affected of modernity. She didn't own a land of her own. And again she mentions that she too benefited from the factory:

[370]Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, 136.

"There had been a time when we, too, had benefited – those days seemed very remote now, almost belonging to another life- but we had lost more than we had gained or could ever regain."[371]

The metropolis is portrayed as having a variety of impacts on Nathan and Rukmani's lives. It is strange, cruel, and oblivious to the suffering of the disadvantaged villagers. They eventually land a job and start making money after much effort. Even better, they are able to save some money for the trip back to their town. Although city life is challenging, it also provides them with a fresh sense of who they are and the confidence they had lost in their village. In the case of Rukmani, the city has a much more profound impact. Even though the city is hostile to outsiders, it helps them become strong and confident. There are suggestions in the book about Dr. Kenny's impact on the creation of a local hospital. Kenny makes the decision to do something that will actually benefit the villages. It is the hospital for which Selvam and Ira could stay back in the village. These kinds of development models do not necessarily dominate and control the "other" or harm nature and in turn, destroy lives of many. Such developmental projects can save lives and aim toward the betterment of all.

On one hand, the city is a ruthless, unforgiving place and on the other, the city offers an opportunity to voice one's own concerns. This happens when Hari witnesses a women's procession in the city. He is amazed to see that women can come up with their agendas and issues and demand a solution for themselves. They are not looking for a man to manage their problems. The city is a strange place. There are hardships that one has to endure in order to survive in a city and there is also hope for those whose voices have been suppressed by the powerful. Suppression of women's voices happens everywhere irrespective of the village or a city. But the scope to come forward and to talk of the issues is limited to the city. And that is why our women novelists time and again have presented the city as a place of contrast.

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[371]Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, 136.

Desai draws attention to the negative effects that immoral, irresponsible development initiatives have on the lives of marginalised people and the environment. Yet she doesn't hesitate to focus on positive changes that can be brought upon by science and technology in the lives of many especially of poor village people. Lila is able to get her mother into a hospital and recover from her illness with the support of the de Silva family. Hari's mother has been ill for a very long time. Even the city that initially proved to be brutal gives Hari some relief in the end. Hari befriends watch repairman Mr. Panwallah. Hari masters the craft of creating and fixing watches. Hari begins to adjust to the ways of the city and moulds himself to be a part of the modern urban working class. Here is a change that happens to the village people. Those who had to leave their villages and come to the city go through the same transformation. The same transformation happens to Rukmani and Nathan when they come to the city. They became construction labourer. From a farmer to a labourer and in the case of Hari, from a fisherman to a watchmaker, modernity changes much of their lives and they begin to adjust to the new life.

Hari's time in the big city changes him from a simple village boy to someone who now plans for a future for his family. After returning to his village he seems hopeful the money he has earned in the city now will bring happiness for all: "He would change it all: he would rebuild the hut, he would work on it now that he was home and make it bright and cheerful and happy."[372]Hari's hope comes from his knowledge that he would be able to survive now when the land is changing. He learns skills that would be beneficial if the village turns into an industrial hub. Desai unlike other female writers is suggesting solutions for survival in a nation that is rapidly changing. The solution is to mould oneself to adjust to the new ways of life. The transformation happens in the case of Hari but at a cost. We understand that the land, the nature and the lives of the people will be altered drastically if the factory

[372] Desai, *The Village by the Sea*, 223.

opens in the village. And at the same time, we also know that the change is inevitable. So the only way to survive is to change oneself. Hari's hope of happiness depends now on his skills in watch-making which will turn into a business if the factory opens. Additionally, he intends to start a chicken farm, which will be a successful venture given that outside people would come to the hamlet to work for the factory. In this sense, modernism has succeeded in transforming the young man from a poor village into a potential businessman. There is no way out for him other than to give in to the intricate web that modernity has spun around him.

Unlike the majority of female authors who are critical of the current idea of modernity, Desai has a distinct perspective on modernity. She is aware that change is coming. Thul becomes a model town for post-independence India because it is adaptable to change during the Industrial Revolution, despite its distant location. Desai's advice is unambiguously to embrace the shift and use it as an opportunity to improve one's financial situation. Hari was a victim of the local power struggles. The societal systems that repressed individuals like Hari, not modernity, are what caused his father to lose everything. Sayyid Ali's ability to advance his status in his hamlet is aided in some way by modernity, the city, and the fact that he was born there. However, it would be inaccurate to state that Desai accepts modernity wholeheartedly. When she describes Sayyid Ali's persona in great detail, she criticises it. She seeks to preserve the delicate balance in which modernism contributes to creation rather than destruction. She wants us to be aware that we should reject the notion that modernity must necessarily hurt the environment. Modernity can break down social barriers and create opportunities.

Similarly, when Markandaya gives an alternate view of modernity through the character of Bashiam, a tribal person who believes that modernity may improve society, we encounter a similar situation. The community of Bashiam suffers at the hands of the wealthy who have come to build a dam in a village. The river, which provides for the tribe's survival,

is being tamed by the construction of a dam. These locals are forced to relocate to locations that are unsuitable for their way of life in order to build up the site. Despite being a part of this community, Bashiam starts working on the project. He is in awe of how machines function and adores the construction of amazing structures. Bashiam's attitude is definitely perplexing. However, Bashiam makes a crucial contribution to our comprehension of modernity. He observes how his own culture despises the tribal populace. Other Indian classes view these folks as inferior and low. He recognises this dichotomy. He believes that modernism that is entirely based on the economy can give people like him and his community opportunities. In a society that is rigidly class stratified, those who currently exist as outcasts may be able to improve their lives through modernity. However, it would be incorrect to assume that the female authors are taking sides. They outline both perspectives on these concepts that control today's society.

These female authors have repeatedly underlined development that can result in beneficial improvements. The lives of the marginalised, the underprivileged, and the destitute may change as a result. For many, development means opportunity, a direct source of income, and the desire for a better life. What Bashiam believes can explain why people like Bashiam and Hari accept modernity is presented in these lines: "'machines are to me what they are to your husband,' he said to her, 'only more. They have given me another way of life.''A better one?'He nodded at once. He had no doubts. The old ways of life held nothing for him.'"[373]

6. Third World cultures can be equally exploitative for poor people:

The hardships experienced by the impoverished are not necessarily brought on by projects of modernity or Western models of development. When particular scenarios are highlighted in the novels, we see that Third World cultures also cause major challenges for the

[373] Desai, *The Village by the Sea*, 43.

underprivileged, particularly women. *Nectar in a Sieve* shows how Rukmani's family endures major setbacks as a result of the village's development effort. We observe how the tannery plant affects their quality of life, the local economy, and their need to participate in the construction process as labourers. However, there is another factor that accelerates the impoverished people's decline and degradation: natural disasters. The natural disaster hits at a time when these individuals are already dealing with issues brought on by modernity. The flood that ruins their crops comes first, followed by the draught that renders harvesting difficult. Rukmani and Nathan endured extreme hardship during the floods, but they survived on what they saved for crisis and emergencies. However, the draught utterly wrecks their way of life. We observe that the owner of the property where Nathan works is hesitant to share the amount of profit that Nathan was promised in the tough times. There is nothing left for Nathan and Rukmani to provide for their kids. However, the landowner and his employee Shivaji threaten to take their land away until they pay at least half the sum. This is a fact of life for Indian farmers who rent land from neighbourhood landlords because they don't own land. The issue is that Nathan and Rukmani struggle to survive because they must not only provide for the children but also pay the owner of the land. Rukmani even goes to a local moneylender to sell the remaining of her possessions, but the lender takes advantage of her vulnerability and offers very little money in exchange. This is also a fact in rural India. Nathan makes the decision to sell the stored seeds they have when there is nothing else to sell. As the source of life and abundance for farmers, Rukmani is opposed to the idea.

It was believed that when India started to grow, the dysfunctional structures that had previously existed and made life so difficult for the country's poor Indians would be eliminated by modernity. And to some extent, it did. In fact, factory work saves lives, if only momentarily. The villagers may now access the water reservoir that the tannery builds for the sake of the industry. While the landowners and money lenders saw the crisis as an opportunity to make money, the factory stood with the people. Our attention is drawn to these

issues by Indian women writers. They invite us to challenge the concepts of Western ecofeminism that believes that Third World countries are better off, and a general theoretical approach would explain the crisis of every third world country alike. But that is not the case. India surely presents a different picture altogether. And because of that, we need to broaden the peripheries of the critical theory itself to evaluate the Indian question.

Another criticism of the third world comes from a woman character named Ila Das in Anita Desai's novel *Fire on the Mountain*. In previous chapters of my thesis, I have discussed how the character of Ila Das raises important ecofeminist questions regarding modernity and urbanity. She clearly rejects the idea that modernity or an upbringing in urban society enables us to have a happy life. She faces the dark side of this money driven modern world. She has come to the mountain village of Kasauli to work amidst the poor. She sees the value of having a connection with nature, a connection that enables one to survive without the extravagance of a modern life. In the novel right after she praises the locals for their capability to work in nature and to provide for themselves she also criticises a few aspects of village life. Desai is not taking any side here. She as an observer is presenting the reality in front of us. She criticises modernity, urbanity, the Western model of development and at the same time she raises issues of child marriage, the lack of education amongst girls, and local political corruption. Ila Das's observation directs our attention to the other side of the picture. The life of the poor is dominated by fear, ignorance, and superstition. In the name of culture little girls are given away in marriage and thereby affecting their health and well being.

Desai draws our attention to a variety of elements of life in the natural world. Her female figures are in tune with nature and react to any changes that occur there. However, she is aware of the problems facing the underprivileged. The power of money has been established as the world's driving force by modernity, which has transformed most of the planet. The contemporary world casts a shadow over the mountainous regions. Desai could

observe how modernism altered the isolated region. Many people consider the factory that makes medicine to be vital and advantageous, but it also poses many risks to the mountainous area and the local population. Desai draws our attention to them in order to highlight the negative repercussions of modernity. In addition to the gradual increase in heat, the land and water are becoming degraded. On the one hand, Desai is outspoken about the genuine state of the locals while also being openly critical of the modern establishments in the area and those who promote such initiatives. There are elements in the regional cultures that also subvert one in the name of tradition. The novel's opening chapter emphasises gender concerns. The central characters like Nanda, Raka have directly or indirectly suffered in the hands of patriarchy. And at the end of the novel incidents like a girl's early marriage and the rape of Ila Das by a local goon present a grim picture of the ground realities. Here too women are seen as commodities and those who are eager to change the situation for good are considered a threat. So the notion that modernity is primarily to be blamed for the ills is not entirely true. Women authors without any prejudice raises questions, directs our attention to diverse issues.

Our attention is drawn to the flaws in the culture itself by Desai's *The Village by the Sea*. Like others, Desai adopts a more objective stance. She criticises the dangers of modernity on the one hand, while also raising issues with traditional forms of male and female domination and other forms of power dynamics. Hari's misfortune isn't necessarily caused by the modernization of the land or the commercialization of the seas. His misery begins in the hands of the locals. His father has never been a boat owner. He rented it, but he has to give it away because he doesn't catch enough fish. This causes their ever increasing challenges to survive in society. Second, the establishment of a social order based on economics is greatly influenced by individuals like the wealthy local fisherman Biju. Biju employs unethical methods, such as smuggling, to accumulate a fortune. He uses the cash to build larger boats in order to get an advantage over his rivals in the fishing industry. The issue is that when a man like Biju begins to fish with modern equipment, he eventually

receives a larger proportion than the others. Differences result from this. Additionally, it is said in the text that Biju ignores the villagers who have spent the majority of their life building boats in favour of hiring solely city males as labourers to build his boat. Problems result from recruiting non-locals instead of locals. The likelihood of obtaining income and surviving is significantly reduced. These features are also present in third-world cultures. When we talk about oppression, the female writers never fail to bring up these other topics that they believe are crucial.

The appalling circumstances in which Hari's family and his family must live are proof that society has failed to improve the lives of the poor, pushing them into deeper crises. There is not enough food to eat and money is not available to support them. They have a difficult lot in life, as Lila's remarks illustrate:"We don't go to school any more, you and I. Only Bela and Kamal go- and next year we won't be able to buy them any new books. We hardly eat anything but this dry bread or dry rice everyday there's hardly ever any money to buy anything within the bazaar- only when we sell our coconuts to the Malabaris. The only time we eat fish is when you go fishing. Father never does and then mother: how will mother get well if she never gets ant medicine?"[374]They are forced to choose a job at a factory because of their abject poverty. They consider moving to the city in order to make a living because of their unfulfilled lives. Hari frequently worries about money and dreams of getting a job in a factory that he believes will provide him with a better life, stability, and income. Hari is aware that the firm will nonetheless employ personnel from the city who are familiar with the operation of the machinery. Locals who can only catch fish or cultivate in the countryside cannot compete with city dwellers. His friend offers an answer to Hari's worries. They will gain machine operation skills. Hari adds yet another crucial element of educational access to this. These underprivileged individuals rarely get the chance to enrol in school, and even

[374] Desai, *The Village by the Sea*, 15.

when they do, there is little chance that they will be able to continue their education. Modernity cannot be held solely responsible. The issue is that young men and women must work with or without their fathers to support themselves and their families because studying is not an option in their cultural or social environment. And it is because of the social catastrophe that they are forced to leave their families and work in the private sector.

When we discuss the plight of the indigenous people in a nation like India, the same form of cultural tyranny is to be blamed. *The Coffer Dams* by Markandaya demonstrates how the Indian society despises the other Indian classes, such as the indigenous. This novel depicts the emergence of a new India. Although the British are losing ground and gradually relocating, there is still a sense of white supremacy on one side. The dam represents their enormous white racial pride and their desire to be seen as the superior race. On the other side, there is another story of oppression: the oppression of the nearby tribal people by the Brahmins and other social classes that are viewed as superior. This domination of the tribal community is older than the white oppression. It is a complicated web. The issue of how equality among all would be granted is complicated, especially in the closing stages of the British Raj. There are many intertwined strands of dominance. We observe that special connections are arising inside the web of class rigidity and racial hierarchy. Helen's relationship with housekeeper Das, Helen's relationship with Bashiam, and Lefevre's friendship with trainee Gopal Rao, Rukmani’s relationship with Kenny are some of the examples where we see the power dynamics is shattered and real human to human connections are forming. A unique awareness of human relationships results from the study of the novels. Here are the examples of friendships forming between characters that are not comparable because of their various social situations and they can be described as being dissimilar. But their shared beliefs and attitudes help them to create a bond.

Through the study of the novels by Markandaya, Desai and Roy it becomes clear that there are multiple dimensions to the links between women and nature. These relationships have been variably defined in the theories of ecofeminism. However, the literary writings provide us with more. The writing of female authors before Ecofeminism became a well-established school of critical thought, however, could make a substantial contribution to the movement's overall theoretical framework. These female authors are able to examine the numerous nuances of this connection between nature and women because they have a certain level of eco-consciousness. The relationship that women have with nature has been a topic of discussion in both theory and post-independence literature. These authors have a slightly different perspective on the subject. In their works, they have been able to exhibit a unique eco-consciousness. This consciousness understands that human lives are a little component of a greater natural world and that human lives are impacted when the natural world is disrupted. These authors have defied convention by highlighting the negative consequences of industrialization on free India's developmental efforts at a time when it was thought that it would improve the lives of underprivileged Indians. They have criticised the Western ideas of modernity through the various character sketches in their works. The journey of the characters has demonstrated how modernity has impacted both human life and the natural world in a variety of ways. Losing one's home leads to a fight for existence, but it has also integrated them into the global community. Thus, when evaluating modernity, women authors are always objective. They have openly criticised it while demonstrating how, when applied with the proper attitude, modernity can be used for the benefit of the common populace. While this environmental consciousness is specifically Indian, it can also be examined in light of the recently emerging ideas of ecofeminism and ecocriticism. The goal is to determine how these novels by Indian women authors namely Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai and Anuradha Roy might be in some respects categorised as ecofeminist, as the theory suggests, while also departing from many features of ecofeminism. Through the

process of identifying parallels and differences, one can observe how these writers have succeeded in developing a distinctive style of eco-critical writing that is unmistakably Indian in essence.

Afterthought:

The connections between man, woman, and non-human nature have been explored by the female authors: Markandaya, Desai, and Roy. They have used characters from various socioeconomic backgrounds to examine this connection. We have seen that those who are less fortunate are more likely to be impacted by environmental deterioration. They lose their land, their livelihood and are left at the mercy of the harsh and alien city and its people. They are said to be from a lower social class. We are also told what they do for a living: Apu is a tailor, Ravi is a village farmer, Rukmani and Nathan are farmers, Hari is a fisherman, Bashiam is a member of a tribe and a factory worker etc. We get this impression that the hardship brought on by the ecological crisis is experienced by these characters regardless of the caste which they belong to. I've come to realize that caste is also a crucial factor in my quest to better understand how environmental degradation and poverty are related. In an Indian context when we talk about Environmentalism we praise traditional Indian ways that have always been ecologically conscious. Yet we do not mention that the same traditional ways have restricted the access of lower caste people to natural resources. In the view of this the famous “Chipko Movement” becomes more than just a movement for conservation. It is a movement for the rights of the native inhabitants over their forests.

All people are impacted by ecological degradation; however, some people from specific castes are more affected than others because they are the most impoverished people in society:

> People of lower castes have experienced increasing conflicts over resource and subsistence rights, livelihood rights, extraction of raw materials, alteration of ecosystems, climate change and livelihood, resource prices, and environmental

> degradation in the cities. It is therefore imperative for the environmental justice scholarship in the post-liberalisation era to recognise the role of caste and the deep natural, social, and cultural processes involved in the making and unmaking of environment and labour in a caste-capitalist economy, which impacts people's sense of freedom and belonging and values/devalues their use, access, and participation in the naturescape.[375]

Yet the silence of the women authors relating to the matter of caste, raises questions. In India since independence, while the country's leaders have worked to advance the nation on the path of progress, caste and religious issues are seen as counter-progressive. As a result, the issues are only vaguely defined, at least in literature written soon after independence and by members of the privileged class. Yet not mentioning an issue does not make it disappear. Om Prakash Valmiki, a prominent Dalit writer says: "While the resources of nature were allocated to the upper caste, the wrath of nature affected the lower caste the most". [376]The author's position in the social and political milieu of the time is something to be considered. However, this issue of caste-related silence while exploring human and non-human nature connection and the impacts of environmental degradation, demands attention and in-depth investigation.

[375]Mukul Sharma,"Environment Justice and Caste after Liberalisation," *Economic and Political Weekly,* April 2, 2023, https://www.epw.in/engage/article/environment-justice-and-caste-after-liberalisation.

[376]Mohit Singh, "Understanding the Impact of Climate Change on Dalits and Marginalised Communities," https://www.outlookindia.com/, June 25, 2023, https://www.outlookindia.com/national/understanding-the-impact-of-climate-change-on-dalits-and-marginalised-communities-harder-news-297864.

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