

**ECOFEMINIST READINGS OF SELECT NOVELS BY  
MARKANDAYA, DESAI AND ROY**

**SYNOPSIS SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF  
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (ARTS)  
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**BY  
SANJUKTA BALA**

**SUPERVISOR  
PROF. NANDINI SAHA**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
FACULTY OF ARTS  
JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY  
KOLKATA: 700032**

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## Synopsis

Dissertation title: **Ecofeminist Readings of Select Novels by Markandaya, Desai and Roy.**

Name of doctoral fellow: Sanjukta Bala

Department of English, Faculty of Arts

Jadavpur University

Supervisor: Dr. Nandini Saha

Professor, Department of English

Faculty of Arts, Jadavpur University



PROFESSOR  
Department of English  
Jadavpur University  
Kolkata-700 032

### **Area of Research:**

The two most significant problems the world is currently facing are environmental degradation and violations of human rights (in terms of gender, race, class, and caste). A new critical knowledge is required to make the connections, develop a theory that can address diverse issues, and establish an egalitarian society for all people. The solution to having a theory that may address various challenges and provide us with a solution may be ecofeminism. It primarily discusses the tie between women and nature and is a reaction to the conventional understanding of that relationship. Both are traditionally viewed as loving, caring, and self-sacrificing beings. Essentialism is a possibility. To that, ecofeminism is a response. The primary ecofeminist tenets are:

- Ecofeminism believes that there are many different layers and a deep connection between women and nature.
- Ecofeminism shows that women's liberation is not possible within the context of the existing systems (Capitalist Patriarchy): (Ynestra King, Caroline Merchant)
- It views that the male patriarchal capitalist attitude that views both nature and woman as the inferior other is the reason for their oppression and exploitation : (Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva)
- It acknowledges the "Feminine Principle" within Nature. By accepting the elements of divinity in nature they aim to do one thing, saving nature: (Francoise d' Eaubonne, Hazel Handerson, Starhawk, Vandana Shiva)
- It believes 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: (Bina Agarwal)

- It believes women and the natural world have a link, and the fight for ecological justice and feminist movements has a similar platform. For Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies ecological issues are gender issues.
- It casts doubt on people's perceptions of growth and development: (Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies)

While studying the works by Indian women writers namely Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, and Anuradha Roy I have found a genuine concern in them for the environment. They have exhibited an eco-consciousness in their works. They show the close connections that women develop in nature. I have explored ecofeminist characteristics in their works; many amongst them have been written a long time before ecofeminism becomes an established critical theory. I have learned more about the traits that define these works as 'ecofeminist'. I have discussed that their contributions may have a considerable impact on modifying the dominant theory of ecofeminism to make it more appropriate for an Indian context. These texts by Indian women authors address certain gaps that are prominent in the mainstream theoretical framework. These gaps are:

- Acceptance of Eastern civilizations as eco-centric
- Unquestioning acceptance of the relationship between women and nature
- Absence of "cultural relativism" in the theory
- The part played by eco-aware men is likewise unaddressed

**Research Question:**

1. How does the literature produced by the women authors exhibit aspects that can characterise the texts as ecofeminist?
2. How does the literature produced by the women authors point at gaps in the mainstream ecofeminist theory?

3. How does the literature produced by the women authors contribute in broadening the peripheries of the mainstream theory?

**Research Methodology:** Close reading of primary texts. Content analysis of available secondary texts.

**Primary Texts:**

1. *A Handful of Rice* (2008), first published in 1966, by Kamala Markandaya
2. *A Silence of Desire* (2009), first published in 1960, by Kamala Markandaya
3. *The Coffer dams* (2008), first published in 1969, by Kamala Markandaya
4. *Nectar in a Sieve* (2007), first published in 1954, by Kamala Markandaya
5. *Fire on the Mountain* (2015), first published in 1977, by Anita Desai
6. *The Village by the Sea* (2015), first published in 1984, by Anita Desai
7. *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (2015), first published in 1982, by Anita Desai
8. *Cry, the Peacock* (2015), first published in 1980, by Anita Desai
9. *The Folded Earth* (2011), first published in 2011, by Anuradha Roy
10. *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (2009), first published in 2008, by Anuradha Roy

**Chapter Synopsis:**

**Chapter 1: Introduction**

In the “**Introduction**” of the thesis titled “Ecofeminist Readings of Select Novels by Markandaya, Desai and Roy” I have explained the term “Ecofeminism” and its primary aims. I have also given a brief description of India’s environmental movements where women have taken up pivotal roles. The term “Ecofeminism” has been coined by a French critic and the proponent of the theory of Western ecofeminism, Françoise 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, the Narmada Bachao Andolan and in numerous other events we see women play a significant role. Women take a central position 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 the introduction of my thesis, I have looked into the source of the idea of “culture 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 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. The modern Western world and many of its primary theories and philosophical treatises have emerged out of the Enlightenment movement which speaks of uniformity, universality, and aims to constitute a definite world order where there would be no place for multiple cultural spaces, faiths and religions. Adorno and Horkheimer in their essay *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002) explain that the project of Enlightenment actually works for the “disenchantment” of the world. They believe that reason becomes the tool with which man aims at explaining nature and its phenomena. Man’s fear of nature has been replaced by curiosity because now he looks at nature as an object of observation and experiment.<sup>1</sup> Thus in his attempt to rid himself of 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

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<sup>1</sup> Max, Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Guenzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 22.

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.

In my aim to explain the source of “man over nature” concept, I have dealt with philosophers like Francis Bacon, Darwin, Adorno and Horkheimer Marx, Engels and Herbert Marcuse. Further, I have explained how in dominant cultures women are also regarded as the inferior other. Ecofeminists have identified that the two forms of domination: domination over nature and domination over women, spring from the same source. They call it capitalist patriarchy. Ecofeminists such as Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Starhawk, Bina Agarwal all agree that women and nature share a special bond. That bond can be explained in various ways: spiritual, material, historical or social. They also agree that the emancipation of women is not possible in isolation. All marginal entities, women, nature, marginal communities, are connected in the web of capitalist patriarchy. Thus the emancipation of one is connected to the emancipation of the other.

Theoretical frameworks encompass spiritual ecofeminism, cultural ecofeminism, and material ecofeminism. Spiritual ecofeminism is centred on the revitalization of the concept of nature as a divine feminine entity. It believes that if we can locate this divine "Feminine Principle" within nature, we will never be able to harm it (as exemplified by Shiva and Starhawk). Furthermore, there is a belief held by many individuals that the dichotomy between culture and nature has been constructed by humanity since the inception of organized societies. The perception of nature has shifted to being perceived as a hindrance in his endeavour to prove his superiority. As a result, nature becomes an object to be manipulated and dominated. Women, on the other hand, are commonly perceived as being subordinate to men. The fundamental bond that unites them is their intertwined history of oppression. This is termed as cultural ecofeminism (as discussed by thinkers such as Shiva

and Mies). Material ecofeminism stresses the fact that women's material reality is such that when nature is harmed their lives also are altered (Agarwal).

In the realm of literature, particularly among works authored by women, there is a deeper exploration of the complex relationships between nature and women. The authors in question bring out various concerns pertaining to gender, social class, and race. They also explore the advantages and disadvantages of city life or urban living. Most significantly, these authors propose an alternative conception of modernity. The analysis of these literary works authored by Indian women highlights the complexity of defining Indian ecofeminism, as it cannot be easily characterized by simplistic or uniform concepts. Ecofeminism is where complex and diversified interactions between men, women, animals, plants and other living things operate. The idea of oneness between all living 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 1940s to 2000s portray women protagonists of different background. These texts also reveal how they connect to nature and how all such relationships have evolved with time.

## **Chapter 2: Many Women Many Bonds**

In this chapter of the thesis named "**Many Women Many Bonds**" I have explained how the women authors namely Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai and Anuradha Roy have explored in different backgrounds the relationship of women with nature. 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 book *The Death of Nature* (1990) explains that the concept of nature and women are constructions both historical and social. There are no essential characteristics inherent in nature or women. 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.<sup>2</sup> The aim of ecofeminism is to question such social constructions and uplift the positions of all marginal entities. Thus ecofeminist aim is to overturn modern constructions of nature and women as passive and inert and a subject of man's control and domination.

An explanation for one of the connections between women and nature is that both have experienced oppression at the hands of capitalist patriarchy. Currently, there are essentially two movements happening in different parts of the world. First, women are fighting to break free from societal and economic restrictions that have kept them in subordination to males. Second, the fight has been waged by environmentalists and campaigners to free nature from capitalism. The modern, capitalist social framework that has been in control of nature and women is what unites these instances of conflict. They are linked by their shared experience of oppression. A social structure that has been systematically undervaluing women and the environment also connects the fights against patriarchy and environmental disaster. Additionally, it opens up the prospect of new moral principles and societal frameworks that do not depend on the exploitation of women and the environment but rather on a framework that promotes environmental sustainability and gender equality.

This research studies the texts by Indian women authors who have portrayed female characters that in many different ways relate to nature, connect with it and respond to it. These women protagonists belong to different social positions and thereby the fundamental quality of such connections differs in individual case. The uniqueness of their respective bonding with nature makes us realise that any theoretical approach that talk about women-nature connection in the third world without considering the multiplicities of connections

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<sup>2</sup>Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1990), 14.

between women and nature is bound to be wrong. There is no one bond; there are in fact many bonds, many connections. Thus any approach to evaluate Indian ecofeminism would invariably reconstruct the main theoretical paradigms as complex, multidimensional and dynamic.

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.”<sup>3</sup> 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, industrial technology is too simplistic. Such simplistic approaches have been questioned by ecofeminist theorists and specific 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 within the nature that they are living in or they have come to. The bond can be explained in terms of materiality, livelihood, or plain love for nature. Some bonds even surpass the mere materiality and almost become spiritual in nature. 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

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<sup>3</sup> Maureen Devine, *Women and Nature* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 25.

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.”<sup>4</sup>

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

1. The unquestioning acceptance of women and nature connection.
2. Women of the third world possess a sense of eco-consciousness.
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

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<sup>4</sup> Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (New Delhi: Rawat Publication, 2010), 19.

ecofeminism.

### **Chapter 3: Ecofeminism and Modernity**

In my third chapter “**Ecofeminism and Modernity**” I have explained how ecofeminism becomes a counter-modernist theory. The European Enlightenment movement has given 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. Mies writes in *Ecofeminism*: “Nature is subordinated to man; woman to man; consumption to production; and the local to the global, and so on.”<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

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, even though 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 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

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<sup>5</sup> Maria Mies and Vandana Shive, *Ecofeminism* (New Delhi: Rawat Publication, 2010), 5.

<sup>6</sup> David Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge Publication, 1996), 124.

superior to other. This dominating 'one,' the 'I,' is then always at war, engaged in a struggle against nature, the other gender, and any other marginal entities that exist in a social system.

The locals, the natives, and the underprivileged do not in any manner reap the benefits of modernity. 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 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 lives 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.

In the novels we witness that in the name of civilising a primitive region, strengthening the military, or constructing a factory to boost the economy projects of modernity are introduced in the villages. Female characters like Nanda (*The Village by the Sea*), Raka (*Fire on the Mountain*), Maya (*The Folded Earth*), and Rukmani (*Nectar in a Sieve*) from the novels are all victims of modernization, which is trusted by a section of powerful males. It is through the women's engagement with the natural world that they are brought to the realisation that the natural world also suffers at the hands of the powerful and the privileged. The criticism of the urban life, the city centric civilisation is also brought forward by the women novelists. They show how the cities are insufficient at fostering harmony. 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,"<sup>7</sup> 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.

#### **Chapter 4: The Issues of Gender, Class and Race**

In the fourth chapter, "**The Issues of Gender, Class and Race**", I have discussed the interconnections between forms of domination. 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, and caste, 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, their fight to live in a

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<sup>7</sup> 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.

world that is governed by capitalist patriarchy. The common history of the subjugation of women and of women's 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 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 the 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."<sup>8</sup> 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 angle; 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.<sup>9</sup>

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 cited the various instances of environmental catastrophes that occurred in different parts of the world, such as the Bhopal Gas Tragedy in India, the Nuclear

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<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

Missiles in Sicily, and the Chernobyl Catastrophe in Russia. 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 culture of the muscleman; between violence of war and the violence of rape."<sup>10</sup> 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.

According to ecofeminists, the historical oppression of women, nature, and other marginal entities points 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 the 'other' (woman, animal, marginal communities) in a subordinate position. The West sees science as universal, knowledge as value-neutral. Following these paths West has arrived at an 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, nature and communities that are considered lower in strata of class and race, have been forced into subservience. Shiva refers 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,

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<sup>10</sup>Gaard and Murphy, *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism* (University of Illinois Press: Chicago, 1998), 15.

rational and emotional, and a conjunction of masculine and scientific dominating over nature, women and the west.”<sup>11</sup>

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*, Roy uncovers the ways that male patriarchy operates, sometimes in the public domain and other times in the home. In this novel, Maya’s 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. 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. Dandekar in Markandaya’s *A Silence of Desire* 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.

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. A similar predicament confronts this village as well. As soon as the first stones of a chemical factory are laid, the difficulties associated with modernity begin to manifest themselves. The protagonists of *The Village by the Sea* are working-class residents of the village. Because of

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<sup>11</sup>Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2004), 16.

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. As was 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.

In her novel, *The Coffer Dams*, 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. This Benjamin 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.”<sup>12</sup>

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 from 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

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<sup>12</sup>Benjamin F. Chavis, “Forward,” in *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots*, ed. Robert D. Bullard (Boston: South End Press, 1993), 3.

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.”<sup>13</sup> Thus recognising the intersectionality of gender, class, colonialism, and race is fundamental to the movement for environmental justice.<sup>14</sup>

## **Chapter 5: Other Marginal Voices: Animal and the Indigenous**

In the fifth chapter, “**Other Marginal Voices: Animal and the Indigenous**”, I have explored how the women authors have successfully presented marginal voices. In previous chapters, I have shown that the texts raise issues regarding gender, race and class. Here the focus is on the animal voices and the voices of the indigenous communities. Both these issues are important within the ecofeminist framework. 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

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<sup>13</sup> Val Plumwood. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), 5.

<sup>14</sup>Kamala Platt. “Ecocritical Chicana Literature: Ana Castillo’s Virtual Realism” in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, ed. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (University of Illinois Press: Chicago. 1998), 144.

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. Josephine Donovan refers 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. 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."<sup>15</sup>

The operation of a capitalist society seems like the transformation of one living being into a nonliving product. The animal is turned into a commodity by society for the sake of market exchanges. 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. 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

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<sup>15</sup> 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.

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.

The socially constructed categories of "woman" and "animal" are comparable in the sense that both are regarded as the subordinate partner 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> These narratives are called by Haraway as "original stories"<sup>18</sup>. First is the story that suggests that hunting behaviour in male hominids results in an evolutionary shift. This Haraway calls as the "Myth of Man the Hunter"<sup>19</sup>. 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

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<sup>16</sup> Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1985), p-5.

<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions*, 5.

Gruen, Haraway points at 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 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 compared to man's ability to hunt and kill.

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. Many theorists, such as Kristin Shrader, have centred their 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* 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, had serious health effects. Lung cancer claimed the lives of many. Not only did it result in the deaths of members of the indigenous labour group who were employed at the mine, but it also tainted the water sources that these indigenous people relied on. As a result of this exposure to contaminated water sources throughout the town as a whole, many people were put in grave danger and ultimately lost their lives. The Urarina people of the Amazon were also affected by corporations that are primarily oil drillers from various developed nations. In Nigeria, she points out the Shell oil company destroyed the Ogoni agriculture and fishing lands.<sup>20</sup>

Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha in their book *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India* (1993) give us an Indian perspective in the context of the exploitation of marginal communities in India<sup>21</sup>. They begin their book with a picture of contrasts that portrays a developing society where a perpetual conflict is boiling up between 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, 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

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<sup>20</sup> Kristin Shrader-Frechette, *Environmental Justice- Creating Equality, Reclaiming Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 118.

<sup>21</sup> Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India* (California: University of California Press, 1992), 5.

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, the communities have been compelled to abandon their traditional lands and become refugees and nomads in the city. 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.”<sup>22</sup>

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

In “**Conclusion**” I have talked about the contributions of the female authors in broadening the peripheries of the theory of Ecofeminism. The women authors have made a number of observations that ultimately make us better comprehend the connections between us and nature. When it comes to India there are a few aspects that are missing in mainstream ecofeminist theory. These are:

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.

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<sup>22</sup>Gadgil and Guha, *Ecology and Equity*, 45.

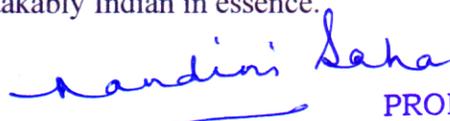
4. People of position and power can sometimes be sympathetic to the sufferers and have a vision of an alternative worldview.
5. A different perspective on modernity.
6. Third world cultures can be equally exploitative for poor people.

The women authors have represented characters that have come from various social classes, therefore the connections they have with one another are never uniform. The form of relationship 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 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. The 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.

There are exceptional male characters presented by the female authors who share strong connections with nature and its inhabitants: animals, outcasts, indigenous population. Characters like Diwan Sahib and Puran in the novel *The Folded Earth*, Sayyid Ali in *The Village by the Sea* 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.

These texts are in fact 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 have failed to consider the consequences 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. The female novelists help us to 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. 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 dictates, 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.



PROFESSOR  
Department of English  
Jadavpur University  
Kolkata-700 032