

# Ecofeminists Combating Patriarchal Ideology: A Study of Postcolonial Indian Fiction

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**Abstract:** Ecofeminism describes the movements and philosophies that relate feminism with ecology. Ecofeminism is an interdisciplinary movement that calls for a new way of thinking about nature, politics, and spirituality. An ecofeminist focuses on the deliberate suppression of women by men leading to the destruction of nature. This paper would present in the Indian context the special bond women share with nature they live in, and would project patriarchy as a dominant tool in exploiting women and nature. To trace patriarchal dimension in postcolonial Indian literature the paper uses qualitative method to study novels that belong to writers who actively participate in movements for environmental causes and issues related to women. Ecofeminists writing postcolonial Indian fiction in English cover the range from early ecofeminism to urban ecofeminism. While outlining ecofeminism in India, the paper focuses on the suppression of women in the male-oriented society and how this suppression impacts their relation with nature and their fight to save it. The study of postcolonial Indian fiction by ecofeminists provide an insight of their struggle against the patriarchal society vented in literature.

**Keywords:** Ecofeminism, Patriarchy, Postcolonial Indian fiction, Suppression of women

Ecofeminism, also known as Ecological Feminism, is a branch of Feminism that particularly examines the relationship between women and nature. The ecofeminist movement began in the 1970s when French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne coined the expression "Ecological Feminism." Ecofeminist analysis explores the connections between women and nature in culture, religion, literature and iconography, and addresses the parallels between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women. Centered on the perceptions of ecology, feminism and socialism, ecofeminism's basic foundation as Greta Gaard (1993) explains, "is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class gender, sexuality, physical abilities and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature." (Gaard 1993, 1) Ecofeminism is based on the basic tenets of equality between genders and an awareness of the associations between women and nature. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, who have been active in the feminist and environmental movements respectively, co-authored a book entitled 'Ecofeminism' in which they express this concern:

In analyzing the causes which have led to the destructive tendencies that threaten life on earth we became aware - quite independently - of what we call the capitalist patriarchal world system. This system emerged, is built upon and maintains itself through the colonization of women, of 'foreign' peoples and their lands; and of nature, which it is gradually destroying. (Mies & Shiva, 2)

The above passage, accentuates patriarchy, authoritarianism, and hierarchy as sources of widespread domination or subordination.

India has witnessed many women-led environmental activism and writings in which women pilot and mobilize their struggles to protect nature. Ecofeminists of postcolonial Indian fiction, viz Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Kamala Markandya, Sohaila Abdulali, Anuradha Roy, Mahasweta Devi, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Usha K.R concentrated on the bond between women and nature; thereby facilitating the development of an Ecofeminist theory. They proclaim the undecided relationship between women and their environment and voice the struggle of women and environment which undergoes various „ism" of domination from time to time. In resisting overall

domination or subordination, indirectly, ecofeminism also addresses the inferior status of other minorities and oppressed people, not just a woman's or environmental concern but one that is ultimately relevant to everyone. Elleke Boehmer states that "postcolonial women writers from India...are equally concerned to bring fore the specific textures of their own existence. Both as women and postcolonial citizens they concentrate...on their own „distinct actualities“ [and] often this is a political commitment" (Shiva 1989, 81). The study of their novels reveals the power structures of the patriarchal, capitalist/materialistic and colonialist societies that cause destruction to women and nature.

The objective of this paper is to explore *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) by Kamala Markandya, *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) by Anita Desai, *The God of Small Things* (1997) by Arundhati Roy and *Folded Earth* (2011) by Anuradha Roy, to divulge the impact of patriarchy on women and nature in the Indian context as well as its role in the ecofeminist concern.

### Connection between women and nature

The connection of women and nature is generally based on three claims of an empirical, conceptual, and epistemological character. The first, empirical claim shows that the direct victim of the impact of environmental deterioration is woman in the name of the development of Science and Technology because of her close association and dependency on nature. The Ecofeminist empirical claim examines the sociopolitical and economic structures that reduce many women's lives to poverty, ecological deprivation, and economic powerlessness (Eaton & Lorentzen, 2003, 2). The second conceptual claim focuses on the construction of society on the basis of a "hierarchy and dualism" (Eaton & Lorentzen, 2003, 2), which reveals patriarchal ideologies as the root causes of domination of women and the exploitation of nature. The third claim is epistemological, centering on knowledge of nature. In this perspective, women have historically been agrarian cultivators and thus favor sustainable and renewable agriculture. Moreover, they are heralded as saviors of nature, invested with the mission to protect, preserve, and nurture the environment (Daly 1978; Eaubonne 1974; Merchant 1980; Mies & Shiva 1993; Ruther 1975). These three connections between women and nature have paved the path for Ecofeminism to frame debates on the exploitation of women and nature.

In 1987, the American philosopher, Karen Warren wrote an influential article "Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections" in which she persuades feminists to turn their attention to ecological problems and to recognize the connection between environmental degradation, sexism and other forms of social oppression. Ecofeminism she asserts is a philosophical vision, an ethical trend as well as a political movement. In her book "Ecological Feminism" (1984), Warren adds that ecofeminism is also "cross-cultural" in that it encompasses "the inextricable interconnections among *all* social systems of domination, for instance, racism, classism, ageism, ethnocentrism, imperialism, colonialism, as well as sexism" (Warren, 2).

In traditional Indian philosophy, nature is seen as a living and creative process, the "feminine principle", from which all life arises. For Indian women, nature is a part of their daily lives, as they share a very close kinship with nature. Nature is a part of their life journey and is an integral part of their growth and self-reliance. Vandana Shiva (1988) critiques modern Science and Technology as a western, patriarchal and colonial project, which is inherently violent and which perpetuates this violence against women and nature. Under the garb of progress, nature has been exploited mercilessly and the feminine principle was no longer associated with activity, creativity and sanctity of life, but was considered passive and as a mere "resource". This has led to marginalization, devaluation, displacement and ultimately the dispensability of women. Women's special knowledge of nature and their dependence on it for "staying alive", were systematically marginalized under the onslaught of modern Science. Mies and Shiva (1993) state the relationship between women and nature as:

Wherever women acted against ecological destruction or/and the threat of atomic annihilation, they immediately became aware of the connection between patriarchal violence against women, other people and nature, and that: In defying this patriarchy we are loyal to future generations and to life and this planet itself. We have a deep and particular understanding of this both through our natures and our experience as women. (Mies and Shiva 1993, 14)

This ambivalent relationship that women experience with the environment is evident through the filter of women writing Indian fiction in English. Ecofeminist Indian women novelists not only explore the bond between nature and women but also shed light on how patriarchy is a key tool in encumbering this bond. But Indian women authors in the present milieu have begun to voice their concerns on not only globalization in India, but also on its impact on gender, family relations, as well as the environment universally. The ambivalent relationship, that women have with the environment bring to the fore, the existential and material crises of women as well as of the environment.

### **Patriarchy and Ecofeminism**

As Richard Foltz notes, "Patriarchy is a male-oriented set of values that seeks to dominate, control, and manipulate for its own ends" (Foltz 2003, 456). Thus, these systems put a select group in positions of power while subjugating everyone and everything else in an effort to maintain that power. Ynestra King suggests that patriarchal thought has led people to believe that there is an inherent opposition between nature and culture, between women and men, and between matter and spirit. King, like many others, claims that such dualisms are constructs of human culture rather than intrinsic aspects of existence. She posits that this misconception prevents people from realizing the true nature of reality, which, as she claims, is that "[l]ife on earth is an interconnected web, not a hierarchy" (King 2003, 458). King goes on to explain that only when we eliminate the idea of the "other" from our conversations and recognize that everything is connected and interdependent will we be able to achieve a more harmonious coexistence on and with the earth. King is pointing out yet another key argument of many ecofeminists, which is that, dualistic thought is harmful and misleading. Such thought necessitates opposition between humans and nature as well as within the human race itself, ultimately creating an unhealthy atmosphere in which it becomes acceptable (and perhaps even appears necessary) to manipulate and dominate others. Ecofeminists have also identified similar issues within religious thought that are believed to be the result of patriarchy. For example, Rosemary Radford Ruether discusses a range of creation stories from the Babylonian tale of Marduk's slaying of the earth mother figure Tiamat to the account of humankind's fall in Genesis. She describes how such stories reflect the social order of the time while simultaneously validating those very same patriarchal systems (Ruether 2003, 464-5).

In her preface to *Ecofeminism* (2014), Shiva adds that violence against women is as old as patriarchy. Traditional patriarchy has structured the minds as well as the social and cultural worlds on the basis of domination over women and the denial of their full humanity and right to equality. Eventually it has taken on more brutal forms, like the murder of the Delhi gang rape victim and the suicide of the 17-year-old rape victim in Chandigarh and other cases. Shiva goes further and adds that violence against women has taken on new and more vicious forms as traditional patriarchal structures have been "hybridized with the structures of capitalist patriarchy" ( Mies & Shiva 2014, 14). Capitalist patriarchy is another system that Mies and Shiva (2014) accuse of changing the course of the lives of the "third world" people, animal and nature towards destruction. "Thus nature is subordinated to man, woman to man, consumption to production, and the local to the global and so on." (Mies and Shiva 2014, 4). Though capitalist patriarchy heralded the "third world" new ideas of development and progress, yet it is rightfully criticized for its skewed development that Mies and Shiva term as male development.

## Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*

Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), was a bestseller and cited as an American Library Association Notable Book in 1955. *Nectar in a Sieve* is an effort to explore how the patriarchal attitude in the form of a tannery by encroachment of the cultivated land to damage the age-old agrarian culture, becomes the root cause of exploitation of women and nature. It is a tragedy engineered by the introduction of industry and modern technology in the idyllic rural life of India. Due to establishment of tannery in the village, the lives of the village people, especially women, get badly disrupted. Markandaya tries to unfold the inseparable relationship that women share with nature. The concept of modernization and development introduced in the village affects the agrarian culture badly and the villagers are alternatively forced to work on the project of the construction of the tannery.

The protagonist, Rukmani is married to a tenant farmer Nathan. Sivaji, the landlord leases out his land to peasants like Rukmani and Nathan. The pathetic condition of landless people is such that they received no concessions in paying their dues to their landlord and are left with nothing; their only hope is to wait for another crop. The landlord sells the land to the tannery for a profitable price. He is thus not bothered over the livelihood of Nathan and Rukmani, who have worked on the land for more than thirty years. Rukmani, as representative of the third world women peasants, is very much associated with nature. She nurtures and cares for the field just as she would her own child. The tannery, according to her experience, is a catastrophe that falls upon the village disturbing not only the simple, primitive, traditional, agrarian oriented families, but also the pastoral land of the village. Rukmani's intimate and intricate relationship with nature is portrayed through her labor in the fields, which represents her affection for nature. For Rukmani, happiness is centered on minimal requirements such as food, shelter, clothes and the scenic charm of the landscape. The sun and the greenery of the fields are a source of joy for her whereas sexuality for her is symbolically equal to the seeding of crops. Rukmani's rumination:

When the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye, 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? (Markandaya 1954, 8)

Rukmani takes admiration and pride in planting seeds and nurturing plants in the garden. She plants a few pumpkin seeds in the garden behind the hut and soon the seeds sprout with delicate green shoots. She frequently visits the nearby well to fetch water for the plants and, sometime later, a pumpkin begins to ripen into yellow and red. She has a lot of admiration for it, "One would have thought you had never seen a pumpkin before" (Markandaya 1954, 11). The growth of this pumpkin boosts her energy and she starts planting beans, sweet potatoes, brinjals, and chillies. She is certain that all these plants grow well in her hand. Rukmani's compassion for nature is moreover visible in her anxiety for the bullock, which has developed many raw patches on its skin with a trickle of blood running down. A similar observation can be made when Rukmani accidentally touches a snake, which Nathan, her husband, kills. In this context, Markandaya observes, "Women can sometimes be more soothing than men" (Markandaya 1954, 17). Later, Kali, one of Rukmani's neighbours, adds her viewpoint: "Poor thing, no wonder you are terrified. Anyone would be. But it is a pity your husband killed the snake, since cobras are sacred" (Markandaya 1954, 17). The novel features women as harmonious with nature, tending to follow traditional Indian cultural customs, such as the belief that the Cobra is sacred and should be worshipped instead of killed. Moreover, Rukmani names her daughter after one of the rivers of Asia, Irawaddy, as water is considered a precious and sacred resource.

The end result of the tannery is that the small farmers lose their livelihood because their sons are lured off the land by paid work. Rukmani and her husband can no longer pay their dues. The landowner also sells the land to the tannery. Rukmani is not ready to accept modernization nor the introduction of the tannery in the village, in what can be seen as representing an ecofeminist stance.

She is forced to confront the noise and the smell of the tannery, the transition of the clammed up village into a hustle-bustle area, Moreover, Rukmani loses her sons to the modern juggernaut: Her sons Arjun and Thambi leave their ancestral occupation of agriculture and join the tannery, later leaving for Ceylon to work on a plantation; Raja, another son, loses his life in the tannery, and Selvem, the fifth son finds work in the city. Rukmani then witnesses the adultery of her daughter and her cruel fate: when her son-in-law had desired a child, he had not been given one, but now she is blessed with an illegitimate grandchild. In short, her life is completely shattered by the tannery.

It is evident that Rukmani has a very strong affiliation with nature. Though farming is her means of bread and butter still the way she emotionally connects with nature is made explicit by Markandaya. Her relation with nature is badly affected because of modernization and patriarchy to the extent that she has to renounce farming and depart from her village despite of the fact that she desperately did everything she could to save the farming land. A victim of patriarchy, Rukmani has to bear the pain silently and stoically witness the exploitation of the rural land.

### **Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things***

Suzanna Arundhati Roy presents “the oppressive coupling of women and nature” (1) in her Booker Prize winning novel *The God of Small Things* (1997). She is known for her active involvement in environmental and human rights causes. Roy portrays the interconnectedness between women and nature, and how patriarchy and hierarchical dualism along with rationalized economic logic is used to legitimize exploitation of the natural environment, women and subordinated people in the Indian society. Roy chooses a small town called Ayemenem near Kottayam in Kerala to narrate the story of Ammu and her twin daughters Esther and Rahel. This novel portrays a veritable picture of the sufferings of Indian women, their cares and anxieties and their submission and humiliation in the patriarchal society continuing on to three successive generations of women. The first generation is represented by Mammachi and Baby Kochhama. Pappachi imparted his patriarchal dominance over the docile, submissive, ungrudging wife Mammachi. Pappachi's physical assault on his wife, Mammachi increases when his sense of superiority diminishes after his retirement from government service and when he discovers the success of his wife's pickling business. Mammachi in order to escape from her abusive husband had started her own business the Paradise Pickles and Preserves. The pickling business is a means of discovering a new life and strengthening her link with nature. Pappachi's insecurity due to his diminished economic power was the reason for his regular abuse of Mammachi and her daughter, Ammu. Ammu of the second generation is the central character of the novel. She is humiliated, insulted and misbehaved with first by her father, then her husband and later on by her family members and society. As a little girl, Ammu had to face a lot of trials and tribulations, cares and anxieties. The tragic picture extends to the sufferings of Ammu starting from childhood and continuing on to adolescence, to the experience of marriage, to a sympathetic and loving mother, and finally to a rebel wife who challenges the age old hypocritical moral stand of a patriarchal family. Ammu had seen her father's cruelty and patriarchal violence:

As a child, she had learned quickly to disregard the Father Bear Mother Bear stories she was given to read. In her version, Father Bear beat Mother Bear with brass vases. Mother Bear suffered those beatings with mute resignation. (Roy 1997, 171).

Ammu takes recourse in marriage to seek release from her life at Ayemenem but after marriage, Ammu discovers that she had jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire. Her husband proves to be alcoholic who stoops to the extent of asking her to satisfy the carnal desire of Mr. Hollick, his boss, so that his job could be saved. Ammu decides not to take on her husband's insults and excesses. Ammu rebels against her husband and goes back to Ayemenem along with her twin daughters - Estha and Rahel. In her parents' home, she is treated differently and is considered as a burden on the family. The family forces Ammu and her children to realize and be aware that they are only intruders in that house. Roy depicts denial of rights of daughters to parental property even

if the daughters worked equal to sons. The older generation's traditional patriarchal views of male privilege heighten Ammu's sense of injustice, as Mammachi's differing attitudes towards Chacko and Ammu reveal. Even though Mammachi has been abused by her husband, she endorses this patriarchal ideology and utilizes Ammu's labour in the pickling factory. Ammu's body is economically exploited by Mammachi and Chacko. Though Ammu and Chacko are sister and brother contributing equally in the growth of their factory still Ammu being a daughter has no claim in the property. "What's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine", Chacko said (Roy 1997, 57).

Ammu spends hours on the riverbank to seek comfort and peace in nature. The ire of the family begins to take its toll on Ammu when she challenges the irrational norms of Indian society based on patriarchal ideology and establishes an illicit relationship with Velutha, an untouchable who is yet another victim. Velutha represents the rebel outcaste with a growing awareness of the self and the talents of the deprived class. Velutha does not use his scientific knowledge to manipulate or overpower nature; instead he finds that this world belongs to nature, which is interconnected with small living things. For Ammu and Velutha, small insects, the river and natural environment are allies that forge reciprocal links between human beings and nature. This shared view of the interconnected world and their resistance to social and economic injustice in postcolonial Indian society solidified their inter-caste relationship. They pay the price of rebelling against the patriarchal by giving up their lives. Roy has depicted brilliantly the predicament of Ammu with a view of condemning the patriarchal dominance in society. What patriarchy had done to Ammu is similar to what modernization had done to Meenachal River. The Meenachal River that flows through the locality of Ayemenem provides livelihood to the locals improving their economic condition. The natural environment is exploited by the introduction of development projects backed by patriarchal capitalism. Construction of hotels in the proximity as a part of the development projects adversely affects the people living along the river and damages the natural environment. The old abandoned house is renovated into a luxury hotel for tourists, bearing a new name, God's Own Country. Once, the river was "Grey green with fish in it. The sky and trees in it. And at night, the broken moon in it." (Roy 1997, 203). Twenty three years ago she was unpredictable, destructive and the most powerful but now she had turned out to be a mere shrunken ribbon. The river is now flooded with industrial and domestic waste. The river "smelled of shit, and pesticides bought with World Bank loans. Most of the fish had died. The ones that survived suffered from fin-rot and had broken out in boils" (Roy 1997, 140).

Another character who rebels against these injustices of patriarchal society is Rahel who belongs to the third generation. While the second generation too puts up a brave but impotent fight against the stringent norms of the phallogocentric set up, the third generation revolts against these norms openly and most audaciously. Roy's critique of patriarchal violence, domination of subjugated people and exploitation of natural environment in India is clearly brought out in this novel. We find that all of the female characters have direct association with nature as they are subordinated and suppressed by patriarchy similar to the plight of nature that is unethically tamed by the culture. The women have to endure the evil of patriarchy and therefore find themselves helpless in providing protection to the bond they share with nature. Though women in the novel are attached to nature in one or the other way, still they can't prevent the exploitation of nature under the influence of patriarchy.

### **Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain***

Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) won the National Academy of Letters Award in 1977 and the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1978. This novel orbits around three women - Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das, their interconnectedness with nature, their victimization and, the oppression of nature. The darker shades of nature and their alliance to the darker aspects of the women concerned are distinctly depicted. The three protagonists victimized by patriarchy, face unjust circumstances of domination and violence. *Fire on The Mountain* exposes various forms of exploitation of both women and nature. As regards the victimization of women, the narrative represents a discourse on violence that centers on the lives of the three women who are victims,

either physically or mentally, of the patriarchal system. Nanda Kaul, a widowed great-grandmother, is a victim of her role as a dutiful wife to an unfaithful husband and as a mother to many children. Raka, her exclusive, withdrawn great-grandchild, is the victim of an abusive father. Ila Das, Nanda's childhood friend, unmarried, is the victim of her selfish brothers and her own reformist idealism. Nanda Kaul is the central character. The novel is divided into three parts. Part I "Nanda Kaul at Carignano" deals with Nanda's secluded life in a sprawling house called Carignano. Part II is titled "Raka comes to Carignano." This part describes the initial hostility and the subsequent rapport that develops between Nanda and her great granddaughter Raka. Part III "Ila Das leaves Carignano" shows Nanda Kaul's meeting with her childhood friend, Ila Das. This part deals with the tragic rape and death of Ila Das.

Nanda Kaul is the one who has suffered a life-time of unhappiness caused by a loveless marriage. At one time, a University Vice Chancellor's wife, she had been the "hub of a small but intense and busy world." Throughout her life, Nanda has conformed to the wishes of her husband and has fulfilled the requirements of his social status. She has selected this severance from all human relationships after passing through psychic suffering and bitter experiences of a hypocritical married life. Her husband does not respect her as a wife, rather he regards her as an excellent hostess of all parties he holds. Desai describes Nanda's trauma as thus:

The old house, the full house, of that period of her life when she was the vice Chancellor's wife was the hub of a small but intense world, which had not pleased her. Its crowding had stifled her....They had so many children, they had gone to so many schools at different times of the day, and had so many tutors...all of different ages and families. (Desai 1977, 29-30)

However, she has never received any affection from her husband. Rather, he has always treated her "as some decorative yet useful mechanical appliance needed for the efficient running of his household." Like all the patriarchal societies the world over, Indian society has also developed a whole series of feminine characteristics like obedience, submissiveness, modesty and piety etc. Nanda has always fitted into this mould of an ideal woman. Instead of appreciating her, her husband has gone ahead selfishly and arrogantly has had his life - long affair with Miss David, a Christian lady. In fact, Carignano adequately fulfills Nanda's wish for solitude, stillness and silence. After serving the family for so many years, Nanda wants to engross in the quiet and peaceful natural setting, releasing herself from the burden of familial responsibilities. This wish is suggestively translated by the use of rich animal symbolism especially insect bird, and plant symbolism. From the very beginning, Nanda is associated with a pine tree connoting her wish for solitude up on the heights of the mountain. She wants to be rooted in a particular space with no other attachments or responsibilities. On the other hand Raka spends her time gazing at a pine charred in the forest fire rather than the fresh leaves of the pine shining in the sun and longs to smell its pleasant fragrance. In fact, Raka's weird interest in decay, destruction and decomposition, as Rogobete believes, "is translated in her frequent association with fire metaphors - symbol of inner trauma, desperate quest for self-assertion and independence" (Rogobete 2009, 97).

Ila Das is an active fighter of women's rights within the community and she appreciates the moral support given to her by Nanda. Ila Das struggles hard in her life to earn some money and later works as a welfare officer just for identity. She fights against the patriarchal norms of the society by enlightening people about the evils of child marriage. However, a society rooted deep in the patriarchal values, hinders and rejects her efforts. While sharing her feelings with Nanda, Ila says, "It's so much harder to teach a man anything, Nanda-the women are willing poor dears, to try and change their dreadful lives by an effort, but do you think their men will let them? Noooo, not one bit" (Desai.1977, 129). Misfortune strikes Ila Das when she is assaulted, raped and murdered by a man Preet Singh, a villager whom she stops from marrying his seven year old daughter to an old widower with six children, for a quarter of an acre land and two goats. The savage cruel Preet Singh leaves Ila Das in a miserable condition: "crushed back, crushed down into the earth, she lay raped, broken, still and finished" (Desai 1077, 143). The fate of Ila Das shows the ultimate destiny of a woman,

which is sexual humiliation or death, if she goes against the patriarchal tradition. Ila's rape and then murder would set an example for other women who would never dare to challenge the patriarchal setup of the society.

*Fire on the Mountain* illustrates the gradual destruction of the ecosystem of the Kasauli hills and its eventual devastation by the raging forest fire. Modern technology which usurps a pristine wild area for an army camp attests to the insensitivity of man towards nature and the patriarchal attitude in destroying the natural phenomena for economic purposes. The destruction of Kasauli landscape parallels the lives of the women in Desai's novel. As a result of patriarchal dominance and violence the female characters have a contrasting bond with nature. Nanda Kaul on the one hand finds solidarity in nature owing to its serenity whereas Raka connects with the decaying and decomposing qualities of nature. The novel depicts the darker shades of nature as connected to the darker aspects of the women concerned and their parallel domination and victimization.

### **Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth***

*The Folded Earth*, is Anuradha Roy's second novel which was long-listed for the 2011 Man Asian Prize. Roy explores the issues of ambition, independence, education, and addresses the prevalent difficulties that even a comparatively self-sufficient woman faces in a patriarchal society. It is narrated by Maya, a young Hindu woman abandoned by her pickle industrialist father for marrying a Christian. In order to maintain their status in the society, her parents have maintained a distance from her. This definitely points out the system of patriarchy, racism and class discrimination which is present in the novel. Roy clearly depicts that women cannot exercise their needs and expectation because it is only the patriarchal society and culture that determines the life of women. Most of the female characters in *The Folded Earth* highlight the "traditional" role of women in a particular culture. Maya's mother plays the role of a submissive mother who couldn't overcome her husband's order; she is split between the orderly words of the husband and her love for her daughter Maya. She had to meet her secretly without the knowledge of her husband "My mother was too intimidated by him to do more than steal out for occasional trysts with me at a temple" (11) through which Anuradha Roy points out the incapability of Indian women who remains voiceless and helpless under the control of their husband. The women are always denied of being independent and are not considered as an individual in the patriarchal world.

Maya moves to Ranikhet after the death of her husband on a hill station in the Himalayas during one of his mountaineering expeditions. At first teaching ineptly in a Christian school and then running a pickle factory with success, Maya gets to know a number of local citizens. Of these, the eccentric old gin-sipping aristocrat, Diwan Sahib, and Charu, a semi-literate cowherd girl, are the main characters. Her simple village bound life is threatened by the arrival of Diwan Sahib's ambitious and fascinating nephew, Veer, to set up his trekking company on the estate.

Anuradha Roy characterizes the hill station thus:

In the hills the sky is circumscribed. Its fluid blue is cupped in the palm and while there is a feeling of limitless distance, we have at the same time the sense that here on our hill is where life begins and ends. Here is where sky begins and ends, and if there are other places, they have skies different from our sky" (Roy 2011, 13).

Nestled in the foothills of the Himalaya, the small village of Ranikhet exists within itself. The village is an isolated one and the people distance themselves from any foreign visitors. They cherish their bond with their immediate natural world and feel contented with its presence neglecting the presence of other humans. In order to forget her sorrowful life, Maya absconds herself to the rhythms of the little village where people understand the voice of nature. "On every side there are mountains and forests, stretching many miles, ... you can see the five pyramids of the PachaChuli, which are at Nepal's door"(Roy 2011, 16). But in the course of time she realizes that nothing is foreign and inaccessible to the modern world when "power-hungry politicians" intimidate her "beloved mountain community." She finds herself caught between the life she had left and the place



she desires to save. The intrusion of outsiders has created an impact on the lives of Maya, Charu and has affected their bond with nature.

Maya finds herself attracted to and has a strange feeling towards Veer, a mountaineering guide, who promotes anti-ecological views in the village. However, Veer does not share any of Maya's feelings and her loneliness is just an excuse for him to fulfil his wants. In fact, Veer neither cares for her nor spends time with her. Maya's relationship with Veer troubles her persistently and she desires to come out of it by all means. Later, Maya comes to know that he was the last trekking companion of her husband Michael and she realizes that Veer has been misusing her. She also comes to know that Veer always encouraged the bad habits of Diwan Saheb because of which his health deteriorated rapidly and he died. She was also aware of his tendency to disappear without warning.

Maya's husband Michael had a cherished bond with nature. After getting married to him she always had a feeling that her husband valued his trekking expeditions over her. "My rival in love was not a woman but a mountain range" (Roy 2011, 6). This depicts Maya's transitional bond with nature. Once considering nature as her rival now Maya finds peace and gratification in nature.

Roy depicts the contrast between the simple village life in Ranikhet and the mechanical city life in Delhi. She focuses on the importance of healthy physical environment for humans and how human interference has caused irreparable harm to nature. When Charu leaves Ranikhet to meet her lover Kundan Singh in Delhi. She describes the polluted atmosphere of Delhi as:

Here the sky was the slate grey colour of village roofs, only dirtier. You could not see far at all, just till the next few towering pillars of buildings, which stood close together like walls with square holes. They looked the same, and as if they would fall any moment. Beyond, there was a haze of smoke (Roy 2011, 214)

Roy describes Charu's first time experience and her feelings, when she visits the capital city Delhi leaving behind her village life as:

What she was not prepared for was the stench. It smelt of putrid things, filthy drains, sewage, burning rubber, and smoke from factories. The stench came in through the windows of the bus, it was all around and she could hardly draw breath without coughing. (Roy 2011, 211)

Roy sheds light on the evils of patriarchy and clearly mentions through her female protagonists the impact of male domination on the lives of women. Roy is concerned with people destroying the wilderness and has dealt with the wilder issues like political upheavals that create barriers that are fast springing up between man and the environment, affecting the bond women share with nature. This concern is brought forth in the novel when Diwan Saheb delivers his annual speech at Maya's St.Hilda school:

That is the forest now-it is a park, it is what is called resource, a factory. It belongs neither to the people who owned it before, nor to the animals and plants that lived in it...you wanted me to call their calls for you- but I've forgotten their voices now. They have no voices any longer."(Roy 2011, 106)

This shows the mere voice of the dying man lamenting the loss and destruction of nature.

*The Folded Earth* correlates the silent sufferings of both women and nature in the village which has lost its glorious and calm environment. The village is turned into a profitable tourist attraction, and boundaries and restrictions are insisted on the villagers too. Roy depicts the village life and the strains and tensions that are a consequence of modernity, change, and religious rivalry. An election brings issues of religion to the fore, threatening to stir sectarian violence. Curious military maneuvers prompt rumors of Chinese spies and fears of a border conflict with Pakistan. While there are scenes of tension and intrigue — a political goon attacks a young girl, Veer's work in the mountains starts to appear suspicious — the novel's mood remains elegiac rather than fraught, expressed through

small tragedies like the burning of a valuable manuscript or the death of a beloved deer. Thus, patriarchy as a system not only dominates women but according to ecofeminist analysis nature also undergoes exploitation and degradation.

In the Indian context patriarchy is the key factor affecting women and nature together. As the study reveals, the subjugation of women and exploitation of nature pave the path for development and modernization irrespective of liberation from colonization and advancement in education.

Rukmani in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* is shown suffering due to patriarchy in the pre-colonial era. The manner in which she is side-lined because of male dominated society is similar to nature being marauded by societies governed by male oriented ideology. The situation remains unchanged for Ammu and Mammachi in *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, Nanda and Raka in Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* or Maya in Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth*. The women characters continue to tolerate male-domination, violence and lack of equality under the patriarchal set up. The study of the novels brings into light the unequal, secondary and exploited status of women in Indian society where women blindly follow the patriarchal rules and traditional structure almost religiously and ritualistically.

The related arenas of Ecocriticism and Ecofeminism have been dominated by typically Euro-American point of view till date, and both fields do not address the issue of Ecofeminism adequately, where both fields need to recognize "the "double-bind" of being female and being colonized" (Campbell, 2008). The exploitation is intact and unaffected by the pre or postcolonial period despite education rights, right to equality movements, and women surpassing or at the least equaling men in all fields. Patriarchy is traced as a key factor in the development of ecofeminist theory in the Indian context affecting the struggle of women to save and protect nature. Studies on Ecofeminism of various authors will definitely lay bare more pain inflicted on women and nature under the banner of Patriarchy. Branching from Ecofeminism, other critical theories also have been developed which only delve deeper into the Eco critical and Ecofeminist views. The scope to analyze the plight of women and nature under the so called male chauvinism and ego centered patriarchal ideologies is unlimited.

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