

Voicing Nature in the Film *Aruvi*: An Ecofeministic Approach

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Abstract:

With the advent of film studies as an academic discipline, the objective reality of cinema is questioned with the incorporation of literary theories within the discipline. It tries to provide a conceptual context to understand a film not just as an art but reflection of social reality. Understanding ecology through a feminist theory facilitated ecofeministic approach to any text. An ecofeministic approach enables a reader to understand the social construct in terms of analysing the subjugation of woman and nature in apposition under a patriarchal community. It not only parallels the togetherness of nature and woman in the contemporary time but even looks back her acquaintance with nature across time. The Indian film *Aruvi*, a change over in the Tamil film industry, metaphorizes the life of the girl, Aruvi the protagonist, with that of nature. This paper explores how Aruvi as a woman who was born in nature's arena becomes a self-agency to voice against the capitalized society in a way demonstrating the aggression of patriarchal community on both woman and nature.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Patriarchy, Nature, Culture, Urbanization

1. Introduction

Back to the dawn of civilization, human beings are entailed in a constant struggle with nature's forces such as gust of wind, pouring rain, ferocious animals and harmful insects, for their survival. In order to protect them from nature's forces, humankind thought of living together with its own species. As women are ordained by nature with bearing children and engaged in nurturing them, it was the man's part to protect the entire womankind and off springs from the harmful forces of nature. He built his own dwellings and designed weapons to fight back the predators and thereby marked the beginning of primitive civilization. So, the progress of civilization is an unceasing fight between nature and man. In course of time, it becomes the pride of man to hold nature under his control. Even the ancient Greek civilization started conducting sports like bull-fighting, bear-baiting and stuff, which in common, had the quintessence of man's domination over nature. Across the ages, man's conflict with nature is a core theme of many world literatures. Even in Sangam literatures, a genre called *Barani* was written in praise of a warrior who had killed thousand elephants in the battlefield. On the whole, it becomes arbitrary that man's dominion over nature is what defined the masculinity of a man. Parallel, man started to perceive woman from the same dominion attitude.

2. Ecofeminism as a study

Since the culture was manifested by the patriarchy, both woman and all other non-human bodies were subjugated by the patriarchal community. The women were made to believe that their dependence on men, for protection against nature, was inevitable for nurturing the children. At one point of time, the man's world had, at its best, completely subjugated the robustness of nature that in the twentieth century, nature's forces became too fragile that it is no more a fear for mankind as much, thanks to modern inventions and urban civilization. This eventually freed the women to get rid of their dependence over men. Ecofeministic studies started to arise as a product of the twentieth century which brings woman and nature in apposition not because they are related but as a common bearer of man's subjugation.

i. Tracing the plot

Written and directed by Arun Praba Purushothaman, *Aruvi* (2017) is an unconventional new - age Tamil film. It is a bildungsroman narrative where the name of the protagonist 'Aruvi' reflects an ecological element - waterfall - symbol of nature's life energy force which gives the eponymous title to the film. Tracing the life of Aruvi, it begins and ends with nature. The little girl Aruvi in her childhood is brought up along with nature. Later, when she is transferred to the urban place, she does not want to live there. But somehow, she has to keep pace with the world that she starts to adapt to the city life like any other around her. But things gone changed when Aruvi is identified to be an HIV infected person by her parents and they disowned her. Being renounced by her own family, Aruvi was forced to seek help from three men sequentially who ultimately raped her, in return for their favour. Aruvi reacted back by making them realize their mistake in a reality show but unfortunately caught up in a commotion, she ended up arrested by the police who mistook her for a terrorist. Since, she was an ailing AIDS patient, she was put up in a medical camp, instead of prison, where she could not make home. She escaped from there and started living in a remote mountainous region where she decided to let go her breadth.

ii. Nature and Woman

According to Vandana Shiva, "Women in India are an intimate part of nature, both in imagination and in practise" (38). In Indian culture, Dravidian culture in particular, is fond of feminizing the nature by naming them in female names whether it be a river or a waterfall or any geographical portions and giving a motherly status like the 'mother-earth', 'mother-nation', 'mother-goddess' and 'mother-tongue'. But contrastingly in this film, the protagonist is named after an ecological element where the naming process is reversed. Both nature and Aruvi are intertwined to represent the agony of globalized patriarchal subjugation. Aruvi becomes the voice of the voiceless nature whereas her unexpressed inner emotions are articulated by the forces of nature. In the opening scene of the film, Aruvi was under an investigation where the cop lost his temper and strikes her. Suddenly, the shot fades out with just the sound of roaring thunder in the background soundtrack. The sound of the cracking thunder equates the inner anguish of the girl. After all these tortures, she is deported to the medical camp in an ambulance while it is raining. There is when she says, "Just now I thought it will rain", to her friend Emily. Here, Aruvi, in her hard times expects the acquaintance of nature, the rain. Not only in tough times, but even when she happens to have some money, she enjoys the pleasure by venturing into a forest area and spent some time in a waterfall. These scenes establishes the interconnectedness between nature and Aruvi. Throughout the film, when Aruvi and nature are together, they remain as individuals and occasions when she and nature are alienated, Aruvi becomes the physique form of nature - voicing representative of nature, being a common victim of man's oppression. Of course, the threat of nature is not addressed directly, Aruvi's comment over the rapid capitalization and urbanization in the reality show bounces an afterthought of how the world is highly degrading its relation with nature, rather exploiting it because of the consumerist behaviour of the world. Also, Aruvi's disease metaphors the polluted nature.

iii. Culture vs woman

Women, in patriarchal community, are seen as a territorial object that can be conquered, exploited and tamed (Wyk 27), same as that of nature. The three men, a corporate manager, a priest and a politician cum businessman who abused Aruvi, represents culture, religion and politics respectively. On leaving the home, Aruvi has asylum in her friend's home. There is where Aruvi encountered the first man who was supposed to be her friend's father. He initially, seemed very kind and cultured who once in a party, asked Aruvi to adjust her strap to bugle his decency but later he is the one who took advantage over her body. The male culture is manifested in a way that it has an authority to cover or uncover a woman's body. Same way, politics and religion also don't assure any shelter to a woman's rights and space for nature.

iv. Self-agency

Aruvi is not casted in a stereotypical heroine frame. She does not need a male agency to take revenge on her abusers that she becomes a self-agent. Her association with the transgender friend also highlights her total rejection of male support. She is determined in proclaiming that she has her own feelings towards man, not in a way infested by a male culture. From her desire for a proposal, “A plain card and when I open it, just three words saying ‘I love you, Aruvi’... the feeling when you read those words... that is love”, she breaks the erstwhile perception that a male hero impresses and seduces to make a woman fall in love who otherwise remains a block of wood with no sexual desire towards men. Rather, she has her own emotion towards men that she just wanted to know someone is in love with her instead of mesmerizing her. Again, she breaks not only the female stereotypes but even questioned the masculine construct. She triggers the politician, one of her abusers, to let out his emotion for a dead old lady by crying in front of everyone in the television studio, breaking away the patriarchal construct that man should not cry.

3. Conclusion

There are efforts by the world to pollute Aruvi but all she can do is keep flowing (Menon). The journey of Aruvi started along with nature and she wants to return back to nature, far from the madding crowd. At the end, in the verge of death, Aruvi wishes to see her acquaintances who abandoned her. This is symbolic of Nature inviting the mankind and ready to accept whoever exploited, polluted and abandoned her. Thus, the film propagates the world to return back to nature.

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