

Indian Ecofeminism in the light of Western Concepts: A Brief Study on Kamala Markandeya Select novels

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Abstract: Literature gives a huge scope to study, discuss and understand various layers of practical life reflected in different genres. Generally, it is a belief that the fiction is the powerful driving force to inculcate the ideas of the writer into readers mind. In order to understand the relation between the literary text and connecting the problem discussed in the text with the reader spread a huge debate among the literary circles in India. The critical discourses revolved around ecofeminism, which had its roots in the West, had also marched fast into Indian Writing in English. However, there were a host of Indian women writers who exhibited Ecofeminist identities in their fiction; the present paper tries to project the same in the light of Kamala Markandeya writings like *Some Inner Fury* (1952), *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), *A Silence of Desire* (1956), *A Handful of Rice* (1966). This paper also highlights how Markandeya differs from the West in the conceptualization of ecofeminism and established her own ideas. In the process of the discussion, the paper first explores the intricacies of ecofeminism and then explains the concepts of ecofeminism in the select novels of Markandeya comparing them to the Western critics like Datar, Plumwood V and Warren J K.

Keywords: Concepts, Ecofeminism, Indian Women writers, West.

1. Introduction:

Human sciences like Biological, Social and Cultural, Human life and Behaviour Sciences connected with the relations among human entities with other living species on the land. When human behaviour acquired its tendencies from biological, social and cultural aspects, the western scholars entwined them into a literary concept like Ecofeminism. This also lead to the study of human life as well as behaviour corresponding to the relations with women and nature. In Western philosophy, it happens with the emergency of ecological arguments and natural sciences like Physics, Chemistry and Astronomy. The term ecofeminism is so wide indicating two theoretical concepts i.e. Feminism and Ecocritical discourses. It is a wrong notion to understand feminism as mere exploitation of women by men but it is how women are the victims of deprivation of nature as women and nature are closely associated as Merchant, 1980, Plumwood (1993) and Datar C (2011) said; “Women as the first victims of the Nature” (p. 126). The question struck the mind of the reader how women and nature are connected in this context. The interface between women and nature needs the study of Daly (1978) and Merchant (1980) who emphasized the link between women and nature are very strong and these two can be sustained on the basis of ideology and biology. Warren J K (1997) claims that there empirical, conceptual and Epistemological characters in the term where the first one exhibits the women as the first victim of environmental destruction in the name of enhancing Science and Technology because her intimacy with nature is indivisible. The second major concept is patriarchal lineage. As quoted by Eaton (2003) “Hierarchy and Dualism” upholds that the prime responsibility of the threat to

nature and women suppression lies with patriarchal ideology. Thirdly, women are a symbol for protector of the nature and renewable source of agriculture. These three important concepts made the connection between nature and women leading a way towards ecofeminism.

2. Ecofeminism concept in West:

In 1974, Francoise d'Eaudonne coined the word 'Ecofeminism' in her book, "Le Feminisme Ou la Mort" with the intention to create awareness among women to save the globe from Patriarchy. She opined that the patriarchy is the major threat to women and nature in the world. She also explained that such suppression and exploitation was not a new thing as it existed right from Neolithic period. In the book, she quoted many incidents in the history how male dominated society exploited women and nature in the world. The selfish nature of men exploited ecological balance leading to degradation. Naturally women are a source of regeneration and rebirth and the symbol of growth of civilization. But in the name science and technology, women and nature subordinated to men by various means of exploitation. The technological progress of man, as described by Carson (2000), has its worst effect on nature in the name of chemicals and obliteration of wild life in many western countries. She concludes her opinion by stressing the need of the hour to save women and nature that are two sides of the same coin. They are to be balanced in various stages of life. In addition to sexism, racism, naturism, Adams (2010) argues that the meat is also masculinised and eating meat is the symbol of male chivalry and strength. It gave a wide scope to many organisation to lead various public movements like equal wages for men and women. There were a group of people in the western society always champion the cause of women exploitation and destruction of nature. Wildlife protection cell, green revolution, female child protection, environment protection and a few other movements have their roots to bid farewell to suppression in the name of race, class, gender and others. All the movements brought forth for the huge debate among public are linked to bring a change in the patriarchal society. The major root cause of suppression of women and destruction of nature lies with male dominated society, it also lead to other parallel movements protecting society from various types of inner and outer pollutions.

3. Indian Ecofeminist Movement:

The major Indian ecofeminist movements started in India at the later part of 19th century. The contribution of major ecofeminist activists like Vandana Shiva, Mies and a host of others contributed to the movement through their works. Ecofeminism (Shiva, 1993), The Violence of Green Revolution (1993), Women, Ecology and Survival in India (2010) and a few others shared their views on reasonable grounds of historical experiences of exploitation and domination of Patriarchy. The impact of globalization, establishment of industries by deforestation, modernization and others dislocated local traditions and culture of living. Ethnicity of indigenous people transformed into supermarket. Women became as an advertisement tool and nature transformed into financial source to the market people. The Traditional practices of the people reveal that Prakruti (nature) and Parvati (Woman) are not two different entities. They are interdependent and never be separated. But the influence of industrialization, modernisation and globalization made these two inseparable entities separated. Chipko movement, Ganga Bachao Andolan, Narmada movement and a few caught the attention of world. India is a land of agriculture. Introducing new technologies in agriculture dislocated farmers and agriculture labour in India made them slaves to the land lords. At this juncture, women and nature exploited in many directions. So they resorted democratic approach to protect themselves from the exploitation. It leads to rethinking of gender, race and nature which deeply associated with human and non human relations.

4. Ecofeminism in India and in West: A brief study:

The important concern of Western Ecofeminists is the exploitation of women and nature basing on profit-based one. As result the environment emerges as a dumping yard for nuclear waste, chemical and lethal materials. There were many agitations against nuclear power plants, chemical factories, refineries to protect

nature. At the same time, there is huge movement against the exploitation of women in the name of sex, gender, race and region. In India, most of the people depend on traditional system of agriculture and rural natural life. The Western influence on Indian life completely changed the life style and biological diversity. Technology excluded women from agriculture in India where women are half share in crop production, cultivation and harvesting process. Women wages for labour are also lowered and treated women as weak and dependent. Constructions of dams, factories and other industries lead to major threat to nature because of deforestation, unauthorised mining, and conversion of cultivated agriculture land to real estate. Chipko movement, Narmada river, Ganga purification, Harhwal Himalaya, movements against nuclear power plants, deforestation, and other major issues has gained global popularity.

5. Kamala Markandeya and Ecofeminism:

One of the major women novelists of India, Kamala Markandeya contributed her major part of fiction with the themes of ecofeminism. Most of her works expose on East and West, Tradition and Modernity, Urban and Rural life reflecting in the shade of Economic, Social, Cultural and Political aspects. A Few of her works are examined here in the light of Ecofeminism. "Some Inner Fury" (1952) projects three different pairs of characters with different attitudes. The first two are Kit-Premala, Mira and Richard. They differ in their opinions and objectives of life with different cultural backdrop, because of their love and understanding made them to be human above all other hurdles. The last one is Indian national freedom struggle under British rule and patriotism. However, the novelist handles these three complex themes with the sense of humanity exhorting that the race, religion, colour and region all are mere before the love for humanity. Out of all the characters in the novel, Mira is exclusively credited with the elements of social reality, tradition, and complex inherited values.

In "Nectar in A Sieve" (1954), Markandeya focuses on industry and 21st century technology in the pleasant Rural atmosphere in India. Establishment of industries and adopting machinery in agriculture forced the rural formers into daily wage labour particularly women where they lost their land, live and natural livelihood. The novelist exposes the relationship between human and nature at many places in the novel and stresses the ecofeminist concern by correlating market financial approach and the difference in practice. She concludes by saying that all the activities against Nature and women are the result of patriarchy. The novel can be interpreted in two ways. The first one is the finding all the elements of Ecofeminim in the novel and the other one is the patriarchy is the root of women exploitation and destruction of nature. She also exhorts through the characters in the novel that the women alone can be the protector of the nature.

In "A Silence of Desire" 1956), Markandeya exposes the problem of married life in Indian society. She portrays the conventional wife, a mother and a household. The theme elevates the clash between confidence and cause in the life of Sarojini and Danekar. Though Sarojini leads a faithful and obedient life, Danekar doubts about her character and suspects her. but the novel concludes by rectifying Danekar's mistakes in life and changed his opinion on women and nature in terms of purity and faith. In the novel, "A Handful of Rice" (1966), Markandeya deals with the theme of dilemma of the Indian people created by the social and economic conditions of the Post Independent period. The Government inefficiency, black marketers, humiliations by the rich people, separation of joint families and a few other put forth a conflict of ideas between modern India and Conventional ideas. The poverty, passion and troubles in life made Ravi to leave his village and settle in the urban life. Even after 15 years of struggled life, Ravi strives for a handful of rice. In spite of many hurdles, the novel stresses the hope for better future than frustration and disappointment.

6. Conclusion:

By examining the select novels of Markandeya, it is observed that the women from rural India throws light on the balancing sustainable environment. Rukmini, Mira and a few other women characters strand for faith and conventional approaches to life. They prefer for rural life in walks of their live. So they preferred Dung in one of the incidents in the novel to fuel the land from the unwanted chemical fertilizers. Female

characters in the novels play a critical role. They stand for protectors of nature which they feel it as their sole responsibility and are pleasant to all natural beings. The re-reading of these novels turns the reader to understand the root cause of the nature destruction by patriarchy. The fight for equal rights and responsibilities is the only solution for the protection of nature and environment. It also give strength to women to protect herself from male domination and also act as a savour of Nature. All the female protagonists of the novels show high strength of body and mind even in the critical moments of crisis and calamities in life. All of them are optimistic in nature hoping better life in future. Life is with full of troubles but the trouble are to be faced boldly by showing our wisdom. Markandeya's treatment of women and nature never gives any scope of desolation and disappointment. As pointed out by Datar, Plumwood and Warren J K, women have a special relationship with nature. Their interaction with nature and their responses to the environmental threats are to be analysed in the light of material reality of class gender and race based on power, property and hard work. If one studies Markandeya novels in the direction, it is proved that women are natural victims of the issues. Thus women and Nature are to be given top priority in whatever the context may be.

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