

The Ecofeminist Aesthetics in *Gift in Green*

Niyathi R. Krishna

Introduction

The woman-nature allegories have been recurring elements in literature and the feminine conceptualization of nature is a significant part of religious texts and myths that conceive almost all geographical features like mountains, forests, trees, rivers, oceans and rain as potent symbols of feminine power inherent in nature¹. Especially in the context of Third World countries consisting of a large number of tribal and indigenous people whose lives and livelihoods are intrinsically linked to the environment, nature worship becomes a customary part of belief systems. On the contrary, in mainstream narratives, instead of the feminine power being considered equal to the masculine, such analogies, metaphors, idioms and conjoined phrases that connect women and nature, reinstate their hierarchical submissiveness to men through various ways.

Post-feminist literature is a reflux of 'other' voices². It has made visible the multi-dimensional intersections between heterogeneous women and the 'others'. *Gift in Green*, which was originally written in Malayalam as *Aathi* and published in 2011, is a post-feminist green literature. A novel which was written almost a decade back, in a regional language in India and translated into English, even before "Sustainable Development Goals" were identified and adopted all over the world, remains extremely relevant in today's context. It posits an alternative narrative to various paradigmatic juxtapositions such as woman-nature, man-culture, and conservation-development.

Nature is the central character in the novel, as it unfolds the eco-centric bond between women and non-human beings. The author, Sarah Joseph, is a feminist and environmental activist, and her writings bear the

signature of her political standpoints. The story is premised on ecological destruction caused in the name of invasive, exclusive and disastrous "development" strategies and the consequent subduing of marginalized people in general and women in particular. It exquisitely defines "sustainable development" through ecofeminism: the "what, how and why" of it.

The novel gives an account of Aathi, an imaginative island, unpolluted by external interventions and outside life. Using textual analysis and employing ecofeminist literary criticism, the paper not only examines the novel in terms of ecofeminist aesthetics, but also interprets its eco-feminist value in addition to environmental ethics. This is done by exploring the concept of ecofeminist well-being in contrast to androcentric development portrayed in the novel. Since postcolonial literary ethos resonates with women-centred concerns for conservation and sustainable social transformation³, this analysis becomes significant from a social perspective as well.

Conceptual Framework

The construction of male-female binary not only polarizes genders apart, but also subverts women from the mainstream narratives through the structural hierarchy wired in the binary. The bifurcation of culture and nature is also accomplished the same way. It doesn't end there. All the established oppressive systems continue to manifest their abusive powers by reinforcing attributes of these binaries, even making them sacred through religious and scientific constructs⁴. While a binary is created, polarized and structured hierarchically, it assumes a vertical position, 'othering' and subduing one pole into the bottom that carries the burden of the system. We exist in a system consisting of various such binaries, including the aspects of class, race, caste, etc. and there exists a parallel matrix between the subjects belonging to the same hierarchy. The interconnectedness

* Assistant Professor, Dept. of Gender Studies, Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development (RGNIYD), Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Govt. of India, Tamil Nadu

between women and nature sharing the bottom ladder of hierarchy is the ideological base of ecofeminism.

Karen J. Warren improvises it to 'women-other human others-nature interconnections'⁵, because men assume themselves as the conquerors of nature and creators of culture, thereby treating as inferior, everything else under their control. This conquest over nature is celebrated as a triumph or milestone in human development that transformed the ignorant, cave-dwelling people into the civilized modern human race. This is one of the inherent reasons development often being inculcated in the human psyche as the conquest over nature. It is not coincidental that women's attributes and qualities are often equated with nature. This is made conspicuous in such a way that their interconnection is that of mutual bondage to man and the culture he has created to maintain his dominance. Ecofeminism highlights the similarity of this mutual 'bondage' and the double control of capitalist-patriarchy⁶ over women and nature.

The Ecofeminist Aesthetics

It is undoubtedly evident that nature and women have always been objects of literary aesthetics, but their subjectivity and standpoints were mostly hidden and excluded. Aesthetics in a globalized world has androcentric and anthropocentric qualities, which operate through a patriarchal and capitalist male gaze. Ecofeminist Aesthetics provides an alternative narrative of both nature and women, thus becoming an inevitable aspect of ecofeminist literary criticism.

If we examine conceptually, ecofeminist literary criticism is an amalgamation of eco-criticism and feminist literary criticism that theoretically interprets the women-ecology inter-linkages. It deconstructs the mainstream narratives, by offering alternative post-humanist visions that dismantled dichotomies and reconfigured non-hierarchical relationships between human and non-human nature⁷. *Gift in Green*, literally and figuratively, is an attempt to highlight ecological harmony and the primal oneness of mutual coexistence.

Water and land are two major metaphors used in *Gift in Green*, since Aathi is surrounded by water and the people completely rely on water bodies for livelihood. The novel uses "the simile of water" as a creative medium to articulate survival and sustenance. It reiterates that life has formed on and over water. Correspondingly, land is represented as the resilient, living body that carries and nurtures life. If land symbolizes the physical form of life, water signifies its mind and soul in the novel.

While water resonates with the conscience and cognizance of the people of Aathi, it is a silent spectator throughout the story. For example, Aathi has a custom

of having story-telling nights. The story teller talks near the water body and proclaims water as the witness. It reminds that "[a]s long as there is water, stories are sure to sprout"⁸, and emphasizes that "[t]here is water inside and outside stories of every kind. Stories enfold the hope for water where there is no water"⁹. While this custom is a medium for socializing and building collective consciousness of people in the novel, most of the stories are about water, which in its spiritual essence is the voice within. Without it, life becomes barren and shallow.

The stories are meant to invoke consciousness and are "rooted in the primeval soil and nourished by the water and the warmth of life"¹⁰. Eventually, these stories nourish the minds of people too. The first story in *Gift in Green* is on the abandonment of Hagar and her son in the desert, which highlights the value of water and lives created around it. The author narrates that Hagar, who has faced the unparalleled thirst for life, "could understand the thirst of people, the infinite value of water and the secret of life scripted into it"¹¹. Following that the story of Govinda, who believes that mountains, rather than a deity, need to be worshipped to get rain and another story about the future witnessing world war for water, etc. focus on the preciousness of water. They reinstate two messages: one, a warning on the unimaginable catastrophe that the human beings are inviting with their mindless, greedy actions; and the other, a reminder to the world not to forget from where we have all come—out of a woman and out of a forest!

Land as a metaphor is mostly associated with respect to women; sexuality, motherhood and synergy, as land represents the physical manifestations of life. The ancestors of Aathi considered their truth as the "primeval oneness with this earth, this water, this forest, these birds and these fish!"¹². Such a land being encroached and the native people displaced are depicted connoting the history of human invasion over nature as well as male domination over women. For example:

*Surely you have heard it echoing through history: 'struggled with the earth', 'fought hard with the earth', 'waged a war against the earth', 'overpowered the earth', 'vanquished the earth', 'tamed the earth'...*¹³

These linguistic expressions which proclaim that earth is to be conquered and owned, resonates with thirst for power and war. The novel depicts a heart rending picture of how the consumerist urge rapes the virginity of the soil; ruthlessly kills the purity and existence of water, the basis of life¹⁴. The symbolic use of the word 'rape' to indicate the plight of the land itself is, indeed, an example of the feminisation of nature.

As one of the stories which points out the futility of war for power combat concludes with the message that "[i]f wearing clothes marked the dawn of civilization,

war portends its end"¹⁵. Drilling down hills, filling water bodies, and massive deforestation for erecting concrete buildings, etc. are depicted structured violence and part of power politics over the land and its inhabitants, including the living and the non-living beings. Water and soil pollutions are major concerns in the novel and they are pictured as pollutions happening in the body, mind and soul of people too.

For an in-depth analysis, this section is divided into two parts:

i. Women and Environment

Women in the novel are associated with the production and reproduction of life, synchronizing and harmonizing it for coexistence and survival. While examined from an ecofeminist perspective, there are three kinds of women-nature allegories used in the novel. The first category ascribes the characteristics of nature in women; the second, ascribes feminine attributes to nature; and the third, ascribes representation of nature and woman as one and the same. However, it is to be carefully noted that these connections are represented not by glorifying the sexist attributes, but correlating the mutual compassion and synergy.

The following lines from the novel align with the first category of association.

*Dinakaran felt her arms enfolding him: arms cool like water, rough like earth*¹⁶.

*Hagar soaked herself in the stream until in her breasts she knew the miracle of water turning into milk.*¹⁷

On the other hand, some metaphors like the following, reaffirm the obvious characteristics of nature as a woman, and specifically, mother. The author attempts to link living beings and nature mostly with the similes of motherhood. The concept of universal motherhood is also prevalent in the novel.

*Safe as in a mother's womb, guarded by the warm sentinel of encircling waters, Aathi had stood secure for ages.*¹⁸

*When the clouds, water throbbing in their wombs, gather and press against each other, inducing labour pains, the rains are born... We've seen it!*¹⁹

In the first category of the women-nature descriptions in the novels, women are shown as the powerful creators as well as the affectionate, yet defenceless universe. In the second category, nature is equated with the over-bearing, caring mother, who is suffering from distress. The third category of metaphorization consists of usages that consider women and nature as one thing. Here, all the marginalised beings including women, children, animals,

plants and nature, are often identified as a single group, or a single thing.

For example, in the line—"from time immemorial, the final resting place for the burden of every sacrifice and the refuge of every innocent person broken and bruised by the depravity of man"²⁰— woman and nature are similes to each other.

According to the novel, woman is the creator, so is nature. As Suja T.V. articulates, the ability of biological reproduction "has given a woman greater emotional capacity for patience and preservation, which is instinctual for the rearing of the offspring. Ecofeminists consider this character of women as supportive to their aptitudes for preservation and conservation of nature"²¹. There is a context where the aborted fetuses beg to the cleaning staff—"Mother, I want to touch the earth"²²— also shows the author's inclination towards addressing women as mothers.

The novel has women-nature idioms like "to know the mind of a woman, he has to know, first, the mind of the land"²³ and "...the pimp who brokers land deals today will not hesitate to broker lass-deals tomorrow!"²⁴. However, similes of nature are used to narrativize men also. Like 'man' resides in wo'man', the novel emphasizes that living beings carry the essence of nature in them. It is undoubtedly evident that while using similes of nature to men, the novel is not highlighting the masculine aspects of nature, but simply portraying her male characters as humane as women.

Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to note that the author uses only female similes to narrate nature, thus conceptualising nature as feminine.

*The ocean is not an insignificant woman. If you make her angry, she will destroy the whole world.*²⁵

*The hot winds pregnant with water drops, drifted across.*²⁶

*Earth Mother, both of us, she and I live on you!*²⁷

Characterizations of women are also significant in this regard. In *Gift in Green*, Kunjimathu is a mother figure and a substantial woman, who prefers Aathi to her fiancé Kumaran. She remains a spinster and her love for Aathi never lessens. She notices the anomaly and finds that the water is unable to tide as it is locked around granite stones, and as a farmer, feels the pain of water being locked in bunds. She protests against Kumaran's projects, which were causing ecological damages in Aathi, by standing in water and refusing to move. In her conversation with friend Karthiayani, she articulates that the sea, which has tides according to the moonrise, is a female, since women also "experience this sort of arousal under the moonrise of men"²⁸.

Shailaja is another significant character who leaves her

husband and his lethally polluted village to find shelter in the purity of Aathi. The irony of Shailaja's village getting more polluted later on, narrates the rippled effect of environmental destruction and its huge and widespread negative impact on the whole living and non-living system. She cannot endure the fact that the river near the hospital is being constantly polluted with hospital wastes and she resigns from her job. Even when her family suffers the pang of hunger, she refuses to work for Kumaran, and dreams Kaaliappan, the ancestor of Aathi who had saved the island with a handful of grains.

Another important character, Gitanjali, comes to Aathi seeking a cure for her daughter Kayal's severe mental problems. Kayal is a victim of abduction and child sexual abuse. Her father runs away to escape the pain, but her mother faces the pain to find a solution. Advocate Grace Chali, who helps the people of Aathi in legal matters and is empathetic to them, is another woman character.

There is a mythical character in the novel, who is a reflection of Aathi itself. The novel gives an account of a mysterious girl, who constantly tries to clean the polluted water and lies in her boat helplessly towards the end. The water around her is so polluted that she cannot drink a drop of it. Noor Muhammed, the only person who has seen the girl, finds her boat dawdling and dancing on the high tide, connoting the chaotic transformation of Aathi.

The man-woman description in the novel is also equally significant. The novel problematizes hegemonic masculinity and the major male characters are ecomasculine. They are neither aggressive nor possess toxic masculinity; instead, they are more sensitive toward women and nature. Whether it is Dinakaran, Chandramohan, Markose or Noor Mohammed, their strength lies in their empathy and compassion. None of the male characters with positive shades exhibits his muscle power to prove his worth or character. Dinakaran sacrifices his life for Aathi. He, being the last story teller, gives his life itself as a message to the people. Thus, he becomes a martyr and guardian angel for an entire village to maintain its unity, sanctity and peace.

Markose, who feels guilty for his mother's lonely death, talks to her in silence. He is a poet and philosopher, and his voice is described as "widely and deeply loved. The heartbeat of a people throbbed in that voice"²⁹. He decides to shelter Gitanjali and Kayal with him. Another character, Noor Mohammed, "would listen intently to the subtle voices of the cosmos and enjoy their variety and the soothing sweetness of their harmony"³⁰. This enabled him to listen to the worries of Aathi. He is the only one who has witnessed the mysterious girl in the novel, who is the alter ego of Aathi itself.

Another significant character Chandramohan, who belongs to another severely polluted village and husband

of Shailaja, empathizes with the condition of people in Aathi. He hopes that only a cosmic flood would suffice to clean up his village. He dreams: "In the fullness of time, in a mystical and climactic moment, the first of the life cells would stir in the water. That would be Shailaja. Out of the rib of her heart would Chandramohan be formed"³¹.

In all these narrations, women-nature interlinkages are that of strength, resilience and potency.

ii. Development and Well-Being

The concept of development is used as an irony in the novel. *Gift in Green* brings into light the hidden agenda and vested interest that disguise as development. Kumaran infiltrates into Aathi in the name of development and proposes to develop Aathi into a city for his own profit and privilege. Therefore, the development that he promises is neither people-oriented nor habitat-concerned. Taking away land from the poor people who inhabit it by falsely promising them an alternate livelihood reminds the readers the various Adivasi movements against corporate invasions over their land, culture, and livelihood.

It can be witnessed in the middle of the novel that many people, who had respected their ancestry and history, slowly lean towards Kumaran's ideology inspired by his brainstorming sessions and prospects of huge wealth. His easy targets are young people and children of Aathi. There is a magician in the novel who entices the children by the colours, flavours and wonders of consumerism through his wilful magic. With the illusion of sweet carts overturning into a marshland, he manipulates majority of the children to prefer a playground. The novel brilliantly shows how an oppressive system works and perpetuates through the oppressed. Women propagating patriarchy are as equally criticized as the labourers in Kumaran's team helping to exploit fellow labourers for the benefit of their employers.

Instead of Aathi's primordial divine spirit Thampuran, Kumaran tries to introduce a new deity to create fragmentation and loss of faith. Worshipping Thampuran, who has no religious inclination, kept the people of Aathi united. The new deity represents various religious invasions in history, where the nature-worshipping tribes have been wiped out from the mainstream society with the arrival of structured, 'celestial God' worshipping religions.

Thampuran's shrine is also an example of Sacred Grove, the eco-friendly worshipping places in Kerala where, along with devotion, the wild life habitat is maintained and preserved. Now, these traditional Sacred Groves are replaced by concrete temples which destroy the habitat. In Thampuran's shrine, the seeds that sprouted on their own "had grown over time and become a dense bush

around Thampuran's shrine. Other than birds, squirrels, snakes, garden lizards, chameleons and crickets—familiar denizens of the forest—as well as amphibious creatures like turtles and frogs, no one had ever laid claim to it³². People living with such a faith develop a positive attitude and concern towards other living beings' needs.

As a paradox to this, while people are in utmost hunger, they witness the construction of "a grandiose temple spire made of pure gold, glittering in the morning sun in jarring disharmony with everything else there: the houses, the people, their clothes, and the pathways..."³³. The novel also depicts the general tendency of nations to spend billions of money and resources to brag the physical manifestations of development, but the actual condition of people remains the same. The novel sturdily resists maldevelopment, as Vandana Shiva calls it, the "development bereft of the feminine, the conservation, the ecological principle"³⁴.

Even though the novel reminds the value of customs, it also initiates questioning and breaking the social reproduction of certain traditional customs and practices that are built on inequality and injustice. Ancestors are significant part of *Gift in Green*, as they represent the helpless, primitive humans themselves who got fragmented in search of land and water. For them, Aathi is an isolated land which gave them shelter while fleeing away from the tyrants who considered "whatever they did was an offense: touching, speaking, eating anything, going to sleep for a moment, falling ill even once..."³⁵. Here, the novelist recapitulates the inhuman custom of untouchability and unapproachability practiced by upper caste communities in Kerala. Ancestors' stories of sufferings are passed on by elders to the next generation, and taught their children: "this is what they have bequeathed to us: this land, this water, this forest"³⁶. The novel remarks that we shouldn't forget the minimalist life of our ancestors when greed drives us mad.

It empathizes with the principles of ancestors who have never polluted nature instead they worked hard on it to survive. They were considerate and caring towards the coming generations and the life encrypted in each living and non-living thing in the nature, which is the core idea of sustainability. They worshipped nature and preserved it, the way it maintained balance and harmony. In the first story told by Dinakaran on the sixth night of storytelling, he mentions: "It is not wrong to harbour desire. But we had better be on our guard when our desires become too big to carry and so inflated that we cease to care for the needs of our own children"³⁷. This can be recognized as the definition of sustainable development and the moral of the novel as well.

Well-being is the experience of health, happiness, and prosperity³⁸. People of Aathi were contented with what

they had. Women enjoyed great freedom and security in Aathi, and "anyone could leave anything anywhere, no matter how precious, and sleep with their door open"³⁹. After supper, women use to go to catch fish, "walking and swimming, and claim the night for themselves... At the crack of dawn they would go home, their pots full of fish and their eyes heavy with sleep"⁴⁰. Aathi's environment heals even an abducted and sexually abused child and gives back her childhood.

The novel condemns the mutually beneficial, unholy alliance between bureaucracy and capitalist groups, which eventually results in the chopping of mountains, landfilling of the marshland, and polluting of the water bodies, by intervening in the natural synchronisation. The novel highlights: "How many generations had to toil to create these paddy fields! The sweat of how many generations has gone into giving the soil its life-sustaining fertility! How many worked with clay, and for how long, to maintain and strengthen the ridges! Is all that to count for nothing?"⁴¹ It also proposes an ecofeminist ideology of mutual respect towards the living and non-living beings and treating them at par with humans. The novel staunchly propounds that human beings are not superior to nature and other living souls. Instead, we must aspire for a life which is ecocentric, not egocentric.

In many places, real documents and events are used to explain ecological destruction and pollution for which the native people have to pay a huge price. The novel gives clear accounts of the growing clutches of real-estate mafia, land mafia, and sand mafia prevailing in Kerala and the struggles of the distressed going in vain. Even when there are adequate preventive laws, serious environmental issues like pollution, unscientific disposal of wastes, and series of epidemics are worsened with the lethargy of government and its growing corruption. "All of Aathi is a green zone meant only for farming"⁴², yet Kumaran forges and manipulates many people's title deeds and other documents to build a township area there. This is similar to the story of many other islands, which remained pure and fertile till the external forceful human interaction destroyed everything.

The novel also portrays harmful effects of pesticides like DDT and Endosulfan, which results in the death of a number of organisms, including the yellow butterflies and frogs. This is a fictional version of the plight of people in Kasaragod district of Kerala suffering from the illegal use of Endosulfan, and their endless struggles against the same. It is also a noteworthy fact that the anti-Endosulfan movements in Kerala have had a huge impact on women, as mostly children are the victims, thus directly affecting the lives of women. Similarly, the condition of the nearby villages of Guruvayoor is explained with documents in *Gift in Green*. Likewise, Chaliyar, the fourth longest river

in Kerala, which was polluted by the waste dumping from a pulp factory that has given birth to an environmental movement demanding its closure is also mentioned.

Gift in Green is a novel with a warning. Recent landslides and floods in Kerala were prophesied in the novel a decade back. It accentuates the need to understand development not only as physical, but as a comprehensive action covering the well-being and happiness of all the people—the foresight needed for any activity concerning environment—and the impact of invasion over nature and women. Here, the novelist is also explaining how the people of Aathi have united against the exploitation and capitalist intervention, which in turn gives a paramount message that an ecofeminist intervention is possible as a means of resistance.

Stories of invasions prove that they always end up in bloodshed. Violence, treachery and manipulations have distinguished the conquerors and the conquered. However, Aathi's resistance is unique. When there were violent arguments and fights over Thampuran's shrine being rebuilt, to everybody's surprise, Kunjimathu and the fellow women break down Thampuran's shrine. She asks Dinakaran not to fight and kill for the sake of Thampuran. It is customarily the right of the women to build Thampuran's shrine in Aathi, yet, she argues: "If darkness is our deity, where and how will you build a shrine for what fills the universe and has no beginning or end?"⁴³ Markose proclaims that the "moment belongs to the mothers of Aathi"⁴⁴ because "before the menfolk could begin rebuilding Thampuran's shrine, Kunjimathu and her women freed Thampuran to the universe, hostage until then within the walls, under the roof, and behind the barred doors of the will of man."⁴⁵ This incident is an instance of what Ariel Salleh points out, "enduring activities embrace biological generativity, daily sustenance, social and generational cohesion. Cutting across ethnicity and class, these roles are almost invariably the province of women's rights, responsibilities and skills."⁴⁶ Therefore, women tend to remain cautious in avoiding conflicts and fights within their society, for making it a better place for their (future) children.

Environmental Ethics and Ecofeminist Value Addition

In the narrative account of the fictional landscape of Aathi, the exquisite ways in which the inhabitants hold fast to the organic spirit of Mother Earth, which nurture them, portrays an utopian aspiration to live in harmony with nature. Here, "nature is seen as a free being living for its own sake and expressing its own desires in an unrestrained, unconditional manner."⁴⁷ Though it may appear rigid and strange, the life practices of people of Aathi, like restriction on selling land to outsiders to prevent

the entry of greedy developers, and the sustainable and mindful use of natural resources, reveal the innate care and empathy for future generations engrained in the collective cultural consciousness of its people. This praxis of environmental ethics that is perpetuated through custom and system forms the cultural premise of Aathi.

Here, culture is formed and shaped with the essence of nature. In contrast, human civilization and varied cultures are formed as a conquest over nature, because of which, it often undermines nature, women and the marginalised through the social reproduction of binaries. Capitalism and patriarchy are the by products of this culture, which over-utilized nature as a resource with its instrumental value. As Val Plumwood points out, "...both men and women must challenge the dualised conception of human identity and develop an alternative culture which fully recognizes human identity as continuous with, not alien from, nature. The dualised conception of nature as inert, passive and mechanistic would also be challenged as part of this development."⁴⁸

The following lines from *Gift in Green* aptly delineate the damage we have done to the earth and ourselves:

*When it begins, life is like pure water, isn't that so, Markose? As we grew up, we keep dumping dirt into it: anger, hate, vengeance, jealousy, greed...then how can our faces shine?*⁴⁹

*We pollute the earth not with our hands alone but also with our hearts.*⁵⁰

*Everyone chokes her [earth] with dirt and garbage, [but she gives] flowers, fruits, nuts, rice and wheat in return.*⁵¹

*The filth we create, we must clean up ourselves.*⁵²

The novel begins and ends with the primordial darkness marking the formation of life. It has characterized darkness, which is often indicated in a negative undertone, as equally significant as light. *Gift in Green* concludes with readers realizing that the humankind has to go back to the darkness once again to find the light within. It delineates that "light gives birth to darkness and darkness to light"⁵³. Therefore, Aathi, which literally means the beginning, doesn't really possess a beginning or end, but it is just a part of the continuum of the universe. Here, the ecofeminist resistance for right to clean environment, which is a basic human right, aims at our consciousness cleansing as well.

The novel starts with a dying Thampuran coming floating over the water, and the ancestors giving him a last gulp of water before death. With his blessings, Aathiturns a fertile land and flourishes. Similarly, the novel ends with the dead body of Dinakaran found afloat, who has sacrificed his life to protect Aathi. This proclaims the repetition of history where Aathi will go through transformation once again. Thus, the novel ends:

Silence.
 Silence impregnable.
 Silence Primeval...like the placental rupture of darkness.
 The whisper of seeds sprouting in the dark,
 The aroma of clay from the Pokkali fields,
 And fingerlings playing in the waters of Aathi.⁵⁴

Conclusion

In a globalized world, capitalist patriarchy is a disguised reality that is perilous not only for environment and women, but also for all the marginalised sections. By only focusing on "the dialectical relationships between production and reproduction, and between production and ecology"⁵⁵ it hangs like a Damocles' sword over holistic development. It masquerades as an inevitable part of modernity and development but pushes majority of the world out of the picture. It is important therefore to identify the interconnectedness of exploitation so as to develop solidarity of resistance to it.

Without well-being of nature that encompasses life, there is no growth and development possible for future generations. The well-being of woman is paramount, next to the ecology. It is a state of equilibrium within, not something that needs to be brought or acquired from outside. Ironically, people are manoeuvred to think that it is possible to achieve happiness and well-being through capital accumulation and consumerism. Ecofeminism sternly warns against this culture and highlights how this, in retrospect, put the world in suffering and danger. It, instead, advocates an eco-centric culture that is sustainable and self-subsistent.

The novel *Gift in Green* poetically and prophetically captures the ill-intended, anthropocentric development breaking the balance and synchronicity of nature as well as the living, non-living beings around. Through visualising the environmental exploitation taking place in Aathi that transforms it into a contaminated, barren land, the novel sensitises the reader the need to redefine development as sustainable well-being and happiness of people instead of the capitalist manifestations of material outcomes and power structure. It not only envisions eco-egalitarian relationships beyond capitalism and patriarchy as an alternative for the future, but also reminds the world that "by living in community rather than hierarchy with other humans and nonhumans, we can advocate for both social and environmental justice."⁵⁶

It is apparent that the ethical framework of sustainable development carries the essential concerns of ecofeminism and both the concepts have emerged in parallel. However, it is quite surprising to note that, despite their mutual objectives and standpoints, the 21st century Sustainable Development Goals do not acknowledge ecofeminism enough in its pragmatic spirit. Interestingly, *Gift in Green*

posits that ecofeminist way of life and survival is the only plausible way forward towards sustainable development.

Note

This research article is an excerpt developed from the author's PhD Dissertation titled "Women, Environment and Empowerment in the Novels of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair" (IIT Roorkee: 2016, Unpublished). The research was carried out under UGC-Senior Research Fellowship.

Notes

1. Suja, T. V. "Revivifying Woman-Nature Equations: Politics in the Poems of Sugathakumari." *Etude: A Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 1.1 (2015): 19-27, p. 20. Print.
2. Rosenfelt, Deborah. "Feminism, 'Post-Feminism,' and Contemporary Women's Fiction." *Traditions and the Talents of Women*. ed. Florence Howe. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991. p. 287. Print.
3. Pillai, Sunila. "Reweaving the World: Ecofeminism, Literary Activism and the Aesthetics of Survival." *Points of View*, 15.2 (2008): 35-41, p. 35. Print.
4. Prathibha, V. "Eco Feminism: An Overview." *Etude: A Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 1.1 (2015): 13-18, p. 16. Print.
5. Warren, Karen J. *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*. USA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000, p. 2. Print.
6. Selam, Ophelia. "Ecofeminism or Death." Diss. State University of New York. 2006, p. 12. Print.
7. Estévez-Saá, Margarita, and María Jesús Lorenzo-Modia. "The Ethics and Aesthetics of Eco-caring: Contemporary Debates on Ecofeminism(s)." *Women's Studies: An interdisciplinary journal*, 47.2 (2018): 123-146, p. 139. Print.
8. Joseph, Sarah. *Gift in Green*. Trans. Valson Thampu. India: Harper Collins Publishers, 2011, p. 16
9. *Gift in Green*, p. 148.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
14. Sangeetha, K. "The Impetus of Ecofeminist Perspective in Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green*." *Singularities*, 1.1 (2014): 71-78, p. 73. Print.
15. *Gift in Green*, p. 72
16. *Ibid.*, p. 279
17. *Ibid.*, p. 14
18. *Ibid.*, p. 52
19. *Ibid.*, p. 239
20. *Ibid.*, p. 347
21. Suja, T. V. "Revivifying Woman-Nature Equations: Politics in the Poems of Sugathakumari." *Etude: A Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 1.1 (2015): 19-27, p. 25. Print.
22. *Gift in Green*, p. 74.

23. Ibid., p. 20.
24. Ibid., p. 316.
25. Ibid., p. 228.
26. Ibid., p. 187.
27. Ibid., p. 212.
28. Ibid., p. 191-92.
29. Ibid., p. 16.
30. Ibid., p. 25.
31. Ibid., p. 229.
32. Ibid., p. 4.
33. Ibid., p. 133.
34. Shiva, Vandana. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993, p. 4. Print.
35. *Gift in Green*, p. 44
36. Ibid., p. 46.
37. Ibid., p. 204.
38. Davis, Tchiki. "What Is Well-Being? Definition, Types, and Well-Being Skills" *Psychology Today* Jan 02, 2019. Web. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/click-here-happiness/201901/what-is-well-being-definition-types-and-well-being-skills>
39. *Gift in Green*, p. 52
40. Ibid., p. 149.
41. Ibid., p. 157.
42. Ibid., p. 225.
43. Ibid., p. 119.
44. Ibid., p. 120.
45. Ibid.
46. Salleh, Ariel. *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx and the Postmodern*. London: Zed Books, 1997, p. 142. Print.
47. Ravichandran, T. "Green Dove in the Shrine: Ecoconcerns in Stephen Gill's Shrine," *Discovering Stephen Gill: A Collection of Papers and Articles*. ed. Nilanshu Kumar Agarwal. Delhi: Authors Press, 2008, 25-34, p. 29. Print
48. Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 36. Print.
49. *Gift in Green*, p. 149.
50. Ibid., p. 229.
51. Ibid., p. 76.
52. Ibid., p. 29.
53. Ibid., p. 108.
54. Ibid., p. 348.
55. Merchant, Carolyn. *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*. New York: Routledge, 2005, p. 196. Print.
56. Rahman, Shazia. "Animals, others, and postcolonial ecomasculinities: Nadeem Aslam's The Blind Man's Garden". *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. September 2020. doi:10.1177/0021989420952125