

ECOFEMINISM IN SELECT ODIA NOVEL OF ADITESWAR MISHRA

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Abstract :

Ecofeminism is a philosophical discourse which incorporates elements of feminism and the ecology movement, asserting that the abuse of women and the destruction of the environment are interconnected phenomena. Inherent to the idea that both women and the environment have been historically exploited, ecofeminism explores how gender, ecology, and social justice intersect, emphasising the need for an integrated approach to addressing environmental and gender-based inequalities.

My present paper's main objective is to analyse and interpret ecofeminism's textual and conceptual essence briefly in the selected novels of Aditeswar Mishra. To achieve this, it is essential to explore relevant ecofeminist theories and perspectives through a thorough literature survey.

The article emphasises that the liberation of women and nature are inseparable, advocating for a new paradigm of socio-environmental justice and expanding on these intersections, examining various dimensions of ecofeminism in India and proposing strategies for addressing these intertwined challenges.

Keywords

Ecofeminism, patriarchy, environmental justice, gender, feminism, nature, sustainability, oppression, intersectionality, climate change, novel, protagonist.

Purpose of the Paper: The paper's objective is to explore the application of ecofeminism in the novel, analysing the relationship between gender, nature, and social issues. The paper is divided

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into three parts. In the first part theoretical discourse of ecofeminism has been included and the second deals with the textual part of the Novel Deshantara, third part tests the ecofeminism

element in the text and concludes with the big problem of capitalism and patriarchal mindset and their joint effect on women and ecology. It further shows the gap.

Between thousands of policies for environmental degradation and the people affected by the same, the realistic picture. The paper is a blend of radical and cultural ecofeminism.

(The paper focuses on rural women specifically tribal .)

Part-one

Theoretical background of Ecofeminism:

Western Feminist Environmentalism: The origin of Western ecofeminism theory lies in feminist environmentalism, which emerged between 1970 and 1990 as an extension of both the feminist and ecological movements. Early ecofeminist thinkers like Karen Warren and Maria Mies connected the

Exploitation of women to the exploitation of the environment, arguing that both were outcomes of patriarchal structures that reduce both women and the environment to objects for exploitation.

The term “Ecofeminism” was first coined by French feminist Françoise d’Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (1974), where she justified that women had a unique role in addressing the ecological crisis due to their close connection with nature. Françoise d’Eaubonne elaborated that the emancipation of women could lead to an ecological revolution to sustain and protect the environment. The term ecofeminism was coined in 1974, but the

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intellectual foundations of ecofeminism are influenced by the broader feminist theories of figures like Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler, as well as by environmentalists like Rachel Carson, whose work (especially *Silent Spring*) highlighted the deleterious effects of pesticides on both the ecology and human civilisation.

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Indian Feminist Environmentalism:

Hindus have been known to think highly of elements of nature since time immemorial. It is believed that the Supreme Divinity is present in every element of nature so Hindus worship each of these elements with faith. The traces are in Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Sutras, and other sacred Hindu texts. Millions of Hindus recite Sanskrit mantras daily to revere their rivers, mountains, trees, animals, and the earth.

Hindus contemplate the earth as Devi, Dharti Mata equal to A goddess and a firm belief that she a mother deserves our loyalty and conservation. Women are Shakti and Prakriti in Sankhya Philosophy who is the cause of creation of the world. Many Hindu rituals recognise that human beings benefit from the earth and offer gratitude and protection in response. Many Hindus touch the floor before getting out of bed every morning and ask Devi to forgive them for trampling on her body. There is no Hindu in India who does not have a Tulsi i.e Holy Basil, *Ocimum basilicum* in the premises of their homes. The women of the home cannot start their day-to-day lives without worshipping this holy plant. While cough/cold attacks any member of the family, they used to give Tulsi leaf with honey as a remedy. Likewise, Banyan, Neem, Amla, and Pipal trees are holy trees which have many scientific values and are worshipped by Indian women. These are only a few illustrations of the connection of women with plants. Tribal people worship Mountains, Soil, River every element connected with nature. Ganga is a holy river that is worshipped as Ganga Mata having temples in Varanasi /Kashi and the place is famous for Ganga Arti. People offer their gratitude to Maa by worshipping her. It's a belief in Hindu families that without pouring the Asthi in Triveni or Offering the Gaya Shradha, the soul of the deceased human won't get moksha. It's the practice in every Indian family which can be connected to the sociological theory of ecofeminism in the Indian context.

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Vandana Shiva, an Indian scholar, emphasised the influence of colonialism, globalization, and corporate control over natural resources on women, particularly in the Global South. Shiva argued that women, as primary caregivers and subsistence farmers, have a unique understanding of ecological processes and are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation. Her work brought attention to how industrial agriculture, deforestation, and monocultures displaced traditional, sustainable practices, often maintained by women.

Key Concepts of Ecofeminism

1. **Dual Oppression:** Ecofeminism theory proposes that both women and the environment suffer from a dual form of exploitation in patriarchal societies. Women have often been

assigned to roles associated with nature, such as caretakers of the land and primary nurturers within the family, leading to their simultaneous subordination alongside nature. When in the name of development nature is destroyed it affects both.

2. **Nature as Feminised:** Feminist scholars like Val Plumwood and Carolyn Merchant argue that in many cultures, nature has been feminised and represented as passive, nurturing, and “motherly,” and is therefore often dominated and controlled in ways that mirror the exploitation of women. This is **evident in how women are seen as caretakers of both families and natural resources.**

3. **Nature as a Metaphor for Women’s Struggles:**

Ecofeminism often views nature as symbolic of women's struggles for autonomy and self-determination. Women’s bodies, labour, and sexuality are frequently seen as metaphors for the natural world, representing fertility, abundance, and reproduction. The exploitation of these “resources” is framed as a form of violence against both women and nature.

4. **Ecological Feminism:** The idea that women, particularly in rural and indigenous communities, maintain a special relationship with the earth due to their roles as primary caregivers, farmers, or land managers. This relationship is often disrupted or disempowered by modern capitalist development, colonialism, and environmental degradation. According to Francoise d'Eaubonne Ecological feminism refers to a whole range of women-nature linkages

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in historical, conceptual, literary, ethical, and spiritual connections to how women and the environment are treated in society.

5. Patriarchy and its Role in Environmental Degradation:

Page | 5 Ecofeminism argues that patriarchal and capitalist systems are mainly responsible for the dual exploitation of women and nature. The global environmental crisis is often framed as the result of patriarchal control over resources, industrial capitalism, and the prioritisation of economic growth over sustainable environmental practices and social equity.

6. Capitalism and Exploitation: Ecofeminists argue that the capitalist system treats both women and nature as commodities to be used for profit, leading to environmental destruction and the marginalization of women in global economies.

7 The Concept of "Mother Earth" and the Nurturing Role: Many ecofeminist thinkers emphasise the concept of "Mother Earth" as a nurturing, life-giving entity that sustains humanity. This metaphor connects women's roles in reproduction and caregiving with the

broader ecological processes that sustain life. Ecofeminism often critiques how both women and the earth are over-exploited and undervalued in patriarchal societies.

8. Reclaiming Nature and Empowerment of Women:

One of the central goals of ecofeminism is to empower women by fostering their connection with nature, enabling them to take an active role in environmental stewardship and to challenge patriarchal structures that both oppress women and degrade the earth.

9. Sustainable Living: Ecofeminists advocate for sustainable and community-based environmental practices that are ingrained in the traditional knowledge and implementation of women regularly in their daily lives, especially in rural and indigenous communities. These practices emphasise respect for nature, ecological balance, and a holistic approach to life.

Part-two

Introduction to Deshantara: I have selected the Odia text Deshantara by acclaimed Odia writer Aditeswar Mishra, who often writes on the exploitations of poor people and invasions over our ecology and its resources, by modern development and the use of technology. His write-ups

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voice the silence of exploited rural and tribal inhabitants. Synthesising folktales and folk songs of western Odisha in his stories and novels he tries to give a picturesque of the real soul of Odisha.

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Deshantara is a Novel divided into two parts. The novel deals with the first part starts with the history of 'Deshantar' which means the migration of the villagers in search of work to other places. Why and when did migration start from their place in fact in Western Odisha in general and Kalahandi, Nuapada, Bolangir, and Sonepur districts in particular? From time immemorial the village Samakupa was famous for the handloom weavers who used to weave beautiful handloom sarees, dhotis, and shawls but no one knew from where another clan came to replace them in their work then those people were forced to shift to be small farmers. The octogenarian old grandfather is telling the story to three kids and the author narrates through him like this" It happened in 1956 when a severe drought attacked the place, no rain, not a drop in Ashadha the monsoon, only wind from the south direction. Nothing to eat even the seeds which were kept have also been eaten even though the drought was so severe that humans ate human flesh. A lion's share of villagers died and some of, those who left the place. After the drought somehow alive returned to the village but there was no plough, no money only a dried agricultural field, At that time of difficulties local tenant called Mahajan captured their land with a little money and they became landless labourers."

Due to heavy draught the following years they had to lose their work. The plot of the novel revolves around the family of Barana and Kishory, comprised of the earning member 'Barana ' and his wife Kishory having three kids, two small boys Chala and Bakala, one thirteen-year-old daughter Tara and their octagenarian father. They used to work in small paddy fields as

Daily wage labourers but machines replaced them and eventually, they became unemployed. Only for arranging two times half-square meals, they had to sell everything. Author narrates

"Once a man of the soil migrated (Deshantari) to meet his hunger so many downtrodden villagers also followed his path to be rikshaw pullers at Raipur and Hyderabad to make brick
“

This story of this family is that the broker or Dalal who happens to be the uncle or Mamu of the main character Barana enters the scene and shows them new unrealistic dreams of their

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future if they go to another place to make bricks with him to work for the contractor, they will get all the comforts like money, mobile phone, good brick house, entertainment and above all good food. Who won't fall into this imaginary net? They are living like hungry animals, unable to get two-time meals and this big dream at their hand! Poor innocent people were captured in this false story. He gives thirty thousand rupees to them and takes away their lives without their knowledge as bonded labourers. The family leaves their daughter with the grandfather and the rest goes with the broker. The novel describes the pain and torture of this innocent family with the real scenario of the exploitation and heart-wrenching story of other bonded labourers. It's very much like the Nazi concentration camps in German-occupied Europe where the Jews were murdered in gas chambers. Here the poor people are forced to work for hours without good food, or shelter in a very inhuman condition and if they fall sick or are unable to

Work or revolt, are punished like anything cutting their hands, and legs, and beaten up to any extent eventually losing their lives. When all the dreams are shattered this family tries to escape from that camp only to be captured by the Gundas or hooligans of the contractor who inhumanly had beaten Barana, and somebody threw away his half-dead body in a railway compartment, he could somehow escape by some people and brought to a hospital but there too he faced more torture in his homeland and within two days passed away making national news. Author narrates

“ He could speak nothing to the police. If he could what would be the result? These people may be taking monthly share from those contractors! He just watched the roof silently “

At the same time, the author describes there Kishory and her offspring were brought and then she was brutally raped by that broker, Dalal, their Mamu. They were sent to their place by train only to enter into another phase of political episode and media vandalism for the death of Barana, the loving husband of Kishory. Part one ends here.

In the last part, little Tara's painful story of rape and execution has been narrated which compels the reader to think about these narrations again and again. These poor people are also part and parcel of this great democratic country where our esteemed Constitution promises Fraternity, Equality and Justice to all the people of the Nation then in the name of caste, religion, race, and gender why does a vulnerable section of society is still away from getting minimum living rights?

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The author says “*When hot boiled Rice is served, there is a beautiful scent all around and this sweet scent of boiled rice is the only hard truth of human life, this small thing of meeting hunger, to fill stomach human migrates to another place and becomes Deshantari*”

Deshantara and Its Ecofeminist Context

The novel depicts the struggle of Kishory who sells her *last katory* (utensil) only to provide some rice on the plates of her family, but one mana (a certain measurement in Odisha) which is less than one kg, how much is it? Insufficient for the family. After this last meal, they will have to stay hungry. Through the grandfather, the old man, the Author narrates how they lost their kul Parampara of weaving, the forest department banned wood cutting, Kishory and her family lost their agricultural land, and became agricultural labourers still they couldn't able to meet both ends, then machines and tractors replaced traditional farming just to throw them out. Kishory a tribal woman leaves her village, her thirteen-year-old girl child, and her father-in-law and steps into an unknown world of bonded labourers. Here in this novel, two females are oppressed most by the impact of the imminent modernity of capitalism.

Representation of Women and Nature: Here in the novel the representation of women and nature has been done in two ways.

One is from the point of view of empirical claim and another nature as a metaphor. The empirical claim refers to the fact that women are typically disproportionately impacted by the negative consequences of environmental damage.” (Stein 2004).

As a metaphor, Kishory and Tara can be compared to Mother Earth.

Kishory the protagonist here in the novel tolerates every painful event just like Mother Earth because she is thinking how to feed her family without thinking about herself. She is intimately connected with the natural world. She works in paddy fields as a daily wage labourer along with her husband as a

Daily wage labourer. She knows about plants, trees, herbs, and shrubs. She loves her surroundings, and small house as well but she has been thrown away from her home and

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homeland brutally. Her exploitation mirrors the exploitation of nature and women. In the name of development capitalism displaces the real owner of the land and nobody cares what happens to them. Aren't they fall under the category of homosapiens? Women are more connected with the natural world. They fetch water, cook, do all the household chores, and work in the agricultural field still their wage is not equal to their male counterparts. In this novel, the reader feels pain while reading Kishory the wife of a person but Mamu has his rights over her body without her permission and he rapes her inhumanly. Kishory is the metaphor here to show how women are typically disproportionately impacted by the negative consequences of the environment! It portrays the devastation of nature too!

Environmental Destruction and Gender: The instances of ecological degradation such as deforestation and loss of agricultural land, replacement of humans by machines eventually disproportionately affected the family drastically. The author depicts *"Jungle has gone. Lakha, Khulna, mahu, and mahuli life has been replaced by commercial plants, railway tracks, and roads, the effect of which people of the region lost their homes and eventually sent as bonded labourers to make bricks to make high-rise buildings to make new urban civilisation by replacing these innocent tribal people from their homeland by torturing them like the nigros were tortured by white people.*

IV. Key Characters and Their Ecofeminist Struggles Female Protagonists: The central female character Kishory in Deshantara embodies ecofeminist values, resilience, and a connection to nature. She comes back to the village even if she is raped, her husband is murdered. She tries her level best to feed her children and her octogenarian father-in-law. In the later part of the novel the author has taken the thirteen-year-old little girl, 'Tara' as the Central character so both Kishory and Tara are the protagonists who never sink and run away from the struggle rather with the inner courage of Shakti the womanhood they fought back with the unavoidable circumstances,

Women as Agents of Change in the novel: In the last section of the novel named 'Bagha bole hun ti, Bhalu bole hun ti which represents a folk tale, We will see how policies affect the family.

Tara the thirteen-year-old girl child of Kishory is sent to an ashram school. Two men approached Kishory and told Govt had sent them to take Tara as her husband had died as bonded labour, They would give compensation of one lakh and now take custody of her

children, showing her again the dream that Tara would eat, read, be given dresses by the government and she will read there comfortably. The girl who has yet not got her menstruation, a small little innocent kid is raped on the very first day in the Kanyashrama by the headmaster an old perverted man. The author narrates here the reality of that tribal girl's hostel, the tribal kanyashram where each girl is a story of devastation. Their families are affected by the destruction of their agricultural land. They have no parent so when they are raped, harassed, or subjugated no one is there to save them so whom to complain? Little Tara tries to escape from that hostel and travels by bus to reach the village of Samakupa but is again captured by the police, and media and politics start there. Her medical examination, question by journalists every little detail of the novel symbolically portrays the subjugation and humiliation of a weaker section whose name is female. Still, Tara doesn't want to die, she resists or confronts the social oppression, individually. She is silent but thinks to go to her mother. Where is her mother? Is she alive now? Who really can say? This is the real picture of third-world countries.

Role of Men and Patriarchy: The patriarchal structures in the novel through the character of Mamu, the broker, the headmaster, and the Mowgli guides who were cutting the hands of the bonded labourers are moving freely in the democratic country raping women and girls every second. Snatching

Their forest agricultural land, displacing them from their homeland and compelling them to go as migrated labourers are living examples everywhere. This capitalist society does not leave the underprivileged men also. In this novella author writes “ Kishory is watching, blood is coming out from his leg, from the thigh, from the hand of the victim. He can no longer rise from the soil, he can not move ...he knows that this is a thorny trap from which no one can escape, where else will they go? Even if he went to his village, he could have sold his half-acre land but who would have bought his land? If not for the people of his cast, even the land can not be sold one is there who can give thirty thousand to repay his loans “. So within this honey trap of migration of labourers, a capitalist venture these rural, indigenous people are falling easily. Women as a gender are not affected only innocent men are losing their valuable lives as well. Women belonging to undeveloped or underdeveloped areas face rape, gang rape, molestation, what not? The author narrates about human trafficking too.

*“Shabara told us we sold these women in exchange for one lakh five thousand. Then the police are telling ...oh! Per one female you get a profit of fifty-five thousand and only give four thousand to us ? “*It shows how the total system is involved in this oppression and it's not imagination rather it's a realistic picture.

V. Ecological Metaphors and Symbolism

Nature as a Metaphor for Women's Struggles: Like our Mother Earth who tolerates all the pain when dynamite blasts her heart to break the mountains like large green Trees fall to

Make roads like the direction of rivers are changed like bridges are made on rivers. She never complains. Her people of the jungle are thrown away in the name of urbanisation, in the name of development, in the name of progress. The father of destruction. Modern science, globalisation, and technology are killing her each second Kishory and Tara are fighting back against their fate to save themselves and their family, silently. Here nature is used as a metaphor for the exploitation and resilience of women: The environmental crises depicted in the novel reflect larger social, political, and economic affairs, that affect marginalized women.

Tara is raped by that headmaster, she even didn't know what has happened with her. Her whole body is in pain, she just wants to go to her mother, and she wants to sleep in her lap but society is capturing her. The writer describes how she is captured by police, and sent for medical examination, she is not able to walk even though “The lady doctor forcefully inserts cotton wrapped in long iron china like the rod to her private part and brought out things to put in a long jar, the doctor looked at her long nail marks on her chest, teeth marks on her cheek and sat on a table and write long lines in the paper. The khaki lady police took her away again “

Little Tara is raped once but she is raped thousand times by a police doctor in a media trial. The writer depicts her pain,

“ How many times will she repeat the same thing? She is feeling breathless by saying the same story and the same question. All are writing no one is watching her face.No one is giving sympathy to her “

VI. Ecofeminist Solutions and Resistance in Deshantar: The novel has not proposed solutions neither to environmental degradation nor gender inequality but has raised a pertinent question about the dual oppression of nature and women especially rural and tribal folk.

Collective Resistance: We can see the moments of solidarity between two central characters Kishory and Tara who were affected by the devastation of nature inappropriately in challenging patriarchal and ecological oppression which indicates hope and empowerment.

In this particular novel between the Silent Lines, it can be assumed that with the social and economic compulsion, both the lady protagonist is raped and molested and forced to tolerate these immoral acts which symbolise how the aesthetic way of nature and the inborn nurturing capability of women are exploited for giving materialistic pleasure and to satisfy their unending sexual hunger of males as a whole. Little Tara steps out of the ‘Swadhar gruh ‘ and does not know where to go, showing the hope of a future road to raise questions against injustice.

VII. Conclusion

My argument here is in the name of technology traditional farming by the bull and oxen, and other farming help animals and their masters ploughing the farm are replaced by tractors and other machines which have thrown away Kishory and her family from their work in agricultural paddy fields. Drought drastically ruined the crop field and no government policy was made for landless labourers. Livestock animals are now farmed commercially by large farmhouses owned by capitalist rich people in the name of organic farming. These small farmers landless labourers face struggle in their daily life on;y to meet their minimum life requirements. Forest departments banned cutting trees or gathering fodder and firewood for their kitchen again imposing a burden on cooking food. Only to meet their minimum bare necessities, these indigent people are compelled to leave their homeland to migrate to another place seeking work which affects the vulnerable section that is women and children of the family. Kishory and her small little girl child Tara are raped as if they are the property of those male persons. The exploitation of both women and nature symbolically depicts the social, political, and ecological turmoils all together. Government officers, Media personnel, and village miscreants didn't leave the family anywhere to their fate rather they took profit of their own encashing their painful story. Their modesty has been devastated but both the ladies stand firm and try to help their family. Their endless struggle gives hope of a new life though their experience certainly voices that the world of men and women is different.

Final Reflection: Deshantara contributes to the ecofeminist discourse within Odia literature in many ways which is discussed in the paper and it provides insight into the broader struggles of indigenous women and the habitat.

In summary, ecofeminism offers a critique of how both women and habitat are subordinated in patriarchal, capitalist societies, and calls for a re-evaluation of how we treat both gender and the environment. By blending feminist theory with environmentalism, ecofeminism advocates for a more holistic, ethical, and sustainable approach to life that challenges domination, exploitation, and inequality. This theoretical lens provides a rich framework for understanding the struggles depicted in literature like Deshantara, especially about gender and environmental concerns.

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Novella ‘Deshantar’ and ‘Baghabole Han Bhalu bole han’ by Acclaimed Odia writer Aditeswar Mishra have been selected as Odia texts for Ecofeminism.

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