

# EXAMINE FICTITIOUS APPEARANCE OF WOMAN AND NATURE: AN ECO-FEMINIST STUDY ON PRATIBHA RAY'S *YAJNASENI* AND GEETA MEHTA'S *A RIVER SUTRA*

Surinder Singh

Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Bhagwant University,  
Rajasthan

## Abstract

*Yajnaseni*, Pratibha Ray has written a brilliant novel around the fascinating character of Draupadi. In the novel, Draupadi not only remains anchored in the epic but also rises out of its pages to become our contemporary and extremely relevant to our times. Pratibha Ray makes a determined effort to present a balanced portrayal of the epic character and brings to the surface the broader and deeper aspects of Draupadi's mind that lie submerged in the majestic sweep of the grand Mahabharata.

This research work is to critically analyze the novel *A River Sutra* by Gita Mehta that presents various myths about one of Indian's holiest rivers, Narmada along with several instances of spiritual beliefs and rituals associated with it which are the binding force to create harmony among the people of various cultures and religions. Indeed rituals, myths and spiritual beliefs have always attracted so many people from not only India but all over the world, irrespective of their social, cultural and religious backgrounds.

In this particular novel, the writer touches the life of various people of different faiths and beliefs, who are from various ethnic groups and have their own way of religious lives. To accomplish this, she presents seemingly unconnected stories in the novel, stories about Hindu and Jain ascetics, courtesans and minstrels, diamond merchants and tea executives, Muslim clerics and music teacher, tribal folk beliefs and the anthropologists who study them. In *A River Sutra*, Mehta gives references to historical figures and incidents to show the harmony between the two great religions of India. Hinduism and Islam are the integral part of the Indian culture. She gives a brief insight on the works of Mogul emperors that built the sanctuary where the bureaucrat now works.

## Introduction

Objectification and suppression is an act of dehumanization that forms inequality, terror, subjugation and neurosis in the society. "The denial of full humanness to others, and the cruelty and suffering that accompany it, is an all-too familiar phenomenon . . ." (Haslam 253). 'Objectification theory provides an important framework for understanding, researching, and intervening to improve women's lives in a socio-cultural context that sexually objectifies the female body and equates a woman's worth with her body's appearance and sexual functions' (Dawn M. Szymanski 6) This dissertation attempts to analyse the representation of both nature and woman in art, literature painting and myth as oppressed creatures and being objectified who manage their survival in exploitative atmosphere. In order to look into these problem two novels of Indian women fiction has been taken into consideration i.e. *Yajnaseni* and *A River Sutra*. A major question of ecofeminism is that what the relation between woman and nature? While focusing on the relation of woman and nature, so many questions popped up while conducting this research regarding to the exploitation of women and nature viz., why do men become authoritative and execute oppression? What are the reasons behind the patriarchal control on myth, art, and literature? What are the ways of dominance prevails in society? How greed of mastery over subordinates leads women and nature towards excruciated exploitation?

This dissertation is going to counter all these questions and making this study significant and momentous in the field of ecofeminist studies. There is plenty of research conducted in the field of ecofeminist studies but are

mainly focused on the background and development of ecofeminism, theoretical framework and statistical data regarding to ecofeminism. But there is scarcity of ecofeminist research which is conducted on the writings of Indian Women Fiction, particularly regional classical writers. This dissertation tries to depict the deep-rooted patriarchal ideology represented in literary texts of this study and is mainly focuses on the representation of the effects of patriarchal ideology that leads subordination towards submissive behaviour to be in a state of bearing exploitation without spite. This study attempts to affix knowledge in the field of ecofeminist studies by presenting the understanding of social construct and comprehending the attempts of patriarchy that associate women and nature with an object in order to implant an idea of inequality on the basis of gender, class, colour, creed or religion. This study also demonstrates how myth making fabricates the concept of low/high order that eventually facilitate rulers/authoritarians to set an idea of suppression and exploitation.

There are various reasons for selecting this topic of research because in modern days especially in India, society is highly inflicted with the influence of hierarchal dominance in order to carry on oppressive attitude and irresponsible behaviour towards woman and nature in order to master not only woman or other subordinates but even nature which is the source of breath to humankind. In the name of development and with the advent of industrialization man has done enormous environmental degradation in recent past and still practicing the same at alarming rate and creating worldwide problems like ozone depletion, deforestation, global warming, soil erosion, pollution and health issues. The degradation of environment particularly in the state of Uttarakhand, India, from where a magnificent moment led by the women of the rural countryside from Chamoli District in 1973 in the history of India and the world in order to save forests. But nature is still suffering and getting exploited under the inhumane activities of man and each year the forest fires are degrading nature and creating health hazards for mankind also. The irresponsible behaviour of man towards nature by exploiting it and exploitation of woman with domestic violence gives me a vent to select this topic for M.phil dissertation.

This study aims to emphasise the works and contribution of women towards society, nature and mankind with various ecological moments mostly led by women such as **Chipko moment, Green Belt moment, Greening of Harlem Coalition** which is well known throughout the world. But now it is extremely painful to notice forest fires each year in the hills of Uttarakhand from where the Chipko moment has started once to save forests. Similarly, women in modern times are still being objectified and exploited through different means of oppressive modes. In the essay, *"Reconstructing Margaret Atwood's Protagonists"*, Patricia Goldblatt asserts that "... women, burdened by the rules and inequalities of their societies, discover that they must reconstruct braver, self-reliant personae in order to survive." (Goldblatt) This study also focuses on Pratibha Ray reconstruction the mythological representation of woman and also highlights the dominated ideology that causes inequality and injustice with woman. She has made it clear in the foreword that Draupadi, in modern times gets mortified because of misapprehension of her character..

The **qualitative approach** is applied to write this dissertation and the theory of ecofeminism is taken into consideration, particularly the understanding of cultural ecofeminism in order to evaluate the patriarchal ideology deep rooted in myth, literature and culture represented in Geeta Mehta's *A River Sutra* and Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni*. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how culture and social constructivism plays a dominant role in creating the social order of hierarchy to suppress and objectify woman and nature. Its aim is to highlight and project social and cultural constructivism as a blot on society that leads woman and nature towards exploitation of both woman and nature which is becoming a burning issue in modern times, related to the sufferings of woman or the degradation of environment by human beings.

This dissertation is organised into four chapters focusing on the understanding of the Theory of Ecofeminism and its applicability to the literary works portraying the role of nature and woman in patriarchal society.

- The **first chapter** of the dissertation deals with the theoretical framework regarding to the theory of ecofeminism and representing the development of ecofeminism mainly focuses on the social-constructivist ecofeminism which is highly significant to this study. An attempt is made to understand ecofeminism in detail in order to locate the suffering of woman and nature in literature through ideas of marginalisation and dehumanisation.
- **Second chapter** in this dissertation ascertains the oppression of woman and nature in Geeta Mehta's *A River Sutra*. It describes how woman and nature are alike and represented similar with the influence of patriarchal ideology. Holy River Narmada is represented with feminine attributes of attraction like seduction, beauty or an object of temptation and woman on the other hand is represented in the novel as an object to be used by authoritarians and it is observed that both woman and nature are found responsible for arousing lust among males.

- **Chapter third** of the dissertation tries to discover the suffering and mental neurosis of a mythical character of Draupadi portrayed by Pratibha Ray in her famous treatise *Yajnaseni*. This chapter investigates the reasons of Draupadi's marginalisation and oppression in the male dominated society and family as well. This chapter reflects the influence of dominated ideology in the life of Draupadi as a perfect moral code which eventually appears more devastating for her throughout her life.

### Conclusion

This study ascertains and propagate the causes and consequences of patriarchal dominance with the help of the analysis of *A River Sutra* and *Yajnaseni* so that the discrimination with woman and nature can be dealt with firm hands and the patriarchal ideology which is endorsed with myth can be identified with proper apprehension and must be disclosed to the masses so that the ideology of oppression can be wiped out whether it lies in myth, art, culture or painting as a social construct. The purpose of my study is not only to explicate theory of ecofeminism or to represent the sufferings of woman and damage of nature but also to criticize the social constructivism and patriarchal emphasis of myth that attributes feminine traits to both woman and nature as submissive. Because this is the only idea with which patriarchal dominance rules not only a single state or nation but try to empower the whole world having a notion that they are supreme to others. In modern times we have seen the different hierarchal practices of dehumanization of the marginalisation of woman and nature under the influence of colonialism, apartheid, neo-colonialism and deforestation, legal or illegal mining activities and similarly *Yajnaseni* and *A River Sutra* are the best examples of the portrayal of women and nature to be objectified through various means.

- After the conceptual discussion of ecofeminism in Chapter First, it is stressed in the next chapter on *A River Sutra* that myth is a tool of dominance that patriarchal society used in order to maintain their supremacy and subordination over others so that the subordinates can be exploited as a source or an object. The prominent idea is to introspect mythical representation of woman and nature must be checked and put under trial so that it can be analyzed whether the myth is a source of disseminating the moral codes in society or laying the idea of patriarchal dominance that causes marginalisation of others. After studying the problem of research (of the carnage of women and nature) in this chapter, it can be concluded that nature and woman are undoubtedly linked to each other in mythological representation of River Narmada which is emphasised by male dominated society to maintain supremacy and of course rule and authority over others. Therefore, this study intends to evoke the conscience of the readers about the deep rooted ideas of dominance that lies in our culture through myth, art and painting as discussed in second and third chapter of this dissertation and wants to emphasise the importance of research in the field of ecofeminism especially among the regional classics of Indian Women writing which projects deliberately the deep-rootedness of dominated ideology in the culture through different means.
- In Chapter Third, the idea of a chaste woman is discussed and questioned logically that why a concept of chastity revolves around females while males remains unchecked and not targeted upon. For an instance, we see in *Yajnaseni*, Draupadi is observed as a sinful character by males in the novel and even in modern times. Similarly the woman has been observed by males as culprit and eventually portrayed as sinful in different literary texts like the portrayal of the character of Sita in *The Liberation of Sita* has to undergo the fire examination to prove her chastity. In *The Scarlet Letter* of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hester Prynne is taken as adulterous in double standard patriarchal society; but on the other hand males are rescued from the same test. In *Yajnaseni*, Arjun is not observed as impious for marrying another woman, Yudhishtir is not seen as a clever person for introducing Draupadi same as he introduces articles to his mother, Bhim still holds his dignity of manhood after marrying to a Rakshasi Hidimba and is not questioned on the basis of chastity, Kings used to have multiple wives but their chastity do not get damaged after having multiple sexual relations at the same time with different wives. But *Yajnaseni*, being a devoted wife to each Pandava receives scorn of Karna, Kaurava, even Pandava and even modern man also misunderstood the sacrifice of her own self for the happiness of others, being an epitome of harmony. Hester Prynne is tagged with letter 'A' that means she is adulterous.



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