

Aspects of Eco-Feminism in Revathi's Musical Plants: A Study

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ABSTRACT:

This research paper examines some aspects of eco-feminism in an anonymous story Revathi's Musical Plants which has been featured in the Balbharati grade 8th English textbook. It states the necessity and pedagogical significance of this paper. The paper argues that ecofeminism has emerged as a study of the relationship between nature and women. The literary texts are useful to understand this relationship and can help to instil values and make the current generation aware of ecological issues. The paper also argues that women and nature suffer in a patriarchal environment. The patriarchal minds oppress, exploit, discriminate, and eventually destroy nature and women.

KEYWORDS: Ecofeminism; Ecology; Feminism; Patriarchy; Revathi's Musical Plants

Introduction:

The ecological concerns have, at least, awakened most of us. However, some movements raised the alarm and called for action in the early seventies. The scholars studied and talked about the interconnectedness of nature and humans but the receivers took a very long time to hear the ringing bell. To spread ecological awareness, the school is a crucial avenue. Across the countries, the school curricula have incorporated informative lessons or courses on nature, especially in the form of stories and poems. Keeping these concerns in focus, it can be argued that the anonymous story "Revathi's Musical Plants" has been included in the Balbharati State Board English Textbook.

Ecofeminism at the World Stage:

The term 'Ecofeminism' was coined by a French feminist and writer Françoise d'Eaubonne (1920-2005). Her association with the Women's Liberation Movement (WLF) and then eventually the Homosexual Front for Revolutionary Action nourished and nurtured her writing and activism. In the last chapter of the book 'Feminism or Death: How the Women's Movement Can Save the Planet (1974)',¹ she coined the much-discussed term 'ecofeminism.' The book is translated into English by Ruth Hottell. A large part of the book deals with the chapter 'For the planetary feminist Manifesto,' where she discusses the urgency of the matter by saying "Time for the ecofeminism" (1974) and seeks constructive actions across the globe. Her works have influenced many scholars like Sherry Ortner, Susan Griffin, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Carolyn Merchant.

The theory is deeply rooted in the cause of environmentalism and women's emancipation. Both movements existed previously but were never put together. The combination of both proved effective in sustainable development. By combining both perspectives, ecofeminists connect women and nature like

never before. It can be seen, by reviewing literature, that women and nature have been dominated, and exploited by the patriarchal world. In d'Eaubonne's view, toxic masculinity is the main reason for the destruction of nature and the exploitation of women (1974). Due credit goes to her, as she was the first writer and activist who found and discussed the connection between women and nature.

The ecofeminists argue that there is a parallel between women and nature that comes from their shared history of oppression by a patriarchal society. They further claim to be part of a distinct social movement where scholars argue against the common exploiter. And hence, the call for women and environmentalists to naturally be united in their struggle gets amplified. It can be observed that this activism grew during the early 1980's and 1990's. The anti-nuclear activists, environmental activists and feminists put up this view strongly. Mary Mellor writes,

"They draw connections between exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women (1999)."

Ecofeminism in India:

The ecofeminists primarily aim for the emancipation of women and nature. These scholars and activists do not merely seek equality but also demand some affirmative actions on the cause of environmentalism. In their view, 'nature is a feminist issue' (Vandana Shiva: 2010). This view provides us with the feminist critiques of socialism and domination, and hence, it contextualizes nature and gender by arguing in favour of 'gendering nature.'

In the Indian context, Dr. Vandana Shiva complements the idea of the interconnectedness of women and nature. As a philosopher, eco-feminist and environmental activist, she started her work with women who were the original tree huggers² in 1972. The Chipko Movement was a Gandhian-style protest carried out by working women. Ever since Vandana Shiva has been very vocal about environmental and feminist issues.

In 2010, Dr Vandana Shiva received the prominent Sydney Peace Prize which indirectly highlights the significance of her work at the international level. She argues,

"The dualism between man and nature has allowed the subjugation of the latter by man and given rise to a new world-view in which nature is (a) inert and passive; (b) uniform and mechanistic; (c) separable and fragmented within itself; (d) separate from man; and (e) inferior, to be dominated and exploited by man." (Shiva 1992, 39)

In her book, 'Staying Alive (1992),' she views the place of women in the light of nature. She argues to view the forests, the food chain and water supplies from the perspective of women. She compares and connects the exploitation of nature with the exploitation of women at the hands of patriarchal men and women. Nature and women have been marginalized in developing and underdeveloped countries. Their voices have been either silenced or forced to stay at the periphery. She demonstrates the inherent exploitative nature of politics and economy. The impact of science and technology on nature and women demands careful reading. It may require quite a long time to understand the ongoing impact, as it is a very complex field.

Aspects of Ecofeminism in Revathi's Musical Plants:

As has been observed that eco-feminism establishes a strong link between the patriarchal domination over nature and the exploitation of women and it works to bring the desired change. The findings and works of ecofeminists have shown us a way and created a space for women to lead the agitation as they led in 1972.

The women are naturally against environmental destruction as can be seen in Revathi's character. The eco-feminism deals with the problems like the rights of women, the rights of animals, and the ongoing issues of deforestation and climate change. A few years ago, a Swedish girl named Greta Thunberg led a massive agitation against climate change. She spread the awareness across the globe. Keeping this perspective at the core, the paper examines some aspects of eco-feminism in Revathi's Musical Plants. Revathi's Musical Plants describes a beautiful relationship between a melodious musician and the plants' response to it. It has been observed that the children get engrossed and excited when they read the story.³ They have some curious questions 'Can the plants listen to us?' 'Do they have ears?' It curiously engages them in the narrative of the story.

Revathi, a titular character, grows a small pot of plants for her best plants competition. When she plays her favourite 'Raga Mohanam' on her violin, the plants surprisingly bend towards her as if they are listening to her music. Suddenly, the pot of plants gets stolen a few days before the best plant competition. This act appears very crude and inhumane in the story. It creates a sense of loss. It disturbs the communication and harmony. The very act of being stolen shows the helplessness of nature. Nature suffers from the inhumane acts of humans. It is her neighbour who maliciously abducts the plants. It must be noted that humans are always in a race to own something or another. The act is not of creation, but destruction. This desire to own something forcefully is at the core of the patriarchal world which has been beautifully described in the story. It highlights the phony nature of mankind who readily snatches things and resources. It is this desire that leads to the destruction of ecology. In a patriarchal society, generally, men desire forcefully or systematically to own, manipulate, and misuse advertently nature and women. It can be argued that they tend to show ownership. They employ power to grab land and resources. It can still be argued that hardly a few care about women and nature and are sensitive towards women and nature. This story demonstrates the bond between humans and nature. Like the kids, the plants are sensitive and respond to human actions. They respond to us, to care and love, and to our music. They tune in with us. In the story, Revathi raises and cares for the plants. She assumes the role of a mother. Her music sounds like a lullaby for the plants. The plants behave as if they are her little kids. She waters the plants. She keeps the pot under the sun for photosynthesis. Whenever she is around the plants, they seem to be happy and lush. It shows the motherly deeds and qualities. Surprisingly, the plants lean towards her when she sings a particular Raga Mohanam on her violin. This is how she identifies it.

"Revathi sat on the bench and played a different tune, one with a quick rhythm. She suddenly saw all the plants turn away from her as though they did not like what she was playing. Then she started playing her favourite tune again and the plants slowly straightened themselves and bent towards her. Her surmise became a certainty. Her plants loved to hear her favourite tune. (BBT 17-18)

The pot gets stolen a few days before the best plant competition. It disturbs her. Meanwhile, the story presents no account of the plants. The plants too have a narrative, but the author seems to have ignored it. It has a story but it seems the humans are not capable or equipped to see or understand their narrative. The act of stealing is no less than the destruction of the plants.

When she arrives at the school, she feels dejected. But she identifies her pot registered under another contestant's name. At the end of the story, Revathi decides to fight for her plants. This stands for the plants. This must be seen as a call for action. To prove the authenticity of her account, Revathi plays Raga Mohanam.

The story Revathi's Musical Plants manifests a wonderful relationship between a girl and plants. It shows the balance and harmony of nature. It can be argued that a girl fights for ecology which matters for all. It

provides kids with a different viewpoint. It provokes them to think about the plants in particular and nature in general.

The story beautifully illustrates the relationship between a woman and her plants. It unfolds the love and cares for each other. The analysis of Revathi's Musical Plants from an ecofeminist point of view shows that the society exemplified in the story is conventionally patriarchal. Even other women function as an agency in a man-oriented world. They are shown as 'greedy and insensitive' towards the plants. The patriarchal society has dominated both nature and woman, destroying the former and demoralising the latter. They laughed at her. They ridicule her, but it does not stop her from winning over her plants. Both nature and women suffer damage and destruction at the brutal hands of insensitive and greedy people. The feelings of a woman, which move fully in tune with nature, are not valued, validated and considered. Her needs and wishes remain unacknowledged and unnoticed. In such a situation, her words fall on deaf ears. She has to voice it out and fight for herself and nature to be heard and respected. The male-centric world laughs at her and mocks her. As is seen in the story, a woman is either disregarded, suppressed or dishonoured. It is only through her voice, that she makes it possible for her.

To conclude, women and nature are not too different. They are co-sufferers at the hands of a patriarchal society. The fight is a cause. The protest is liberation. The damage done to nature is displayed through the felling of trees, destruction of the landscape, and hunting and killing of animals for pleasure and pride. Ecofeminists believe in the close connection between women and nature. They believe when nature is protected, women will be protected and respected too. Both nature and women go through the experience of mothering, and they nourish their offspring. In other words, both of them are sensitive to the needs of those they created. A woman-nature nexus has to be respected and taken seriously for a better future.

Endnotes:

¹See, 'Feminism or Death' basically asks the reader to choose either. This is a direct call for action and intervention. It is widely believed that this approach can save the planet from the industrialized and globalized destruction.

²To save the trees from cutting the local women clung or hugged the trees. That's how the movement was labelled as 'Chipko Movement.'

³As a secondary teacher, I have personally observed the children getting engrossed and excited in the story and heard their questions.

Work Cited:

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