

WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH: TOWARD A  
POSTCOLONIAL ECOFEMINISM

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Women and the Environment of the Global South: Toward a Postcolonial Ecofeminism

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## ABSTRACT

In this study I claim that mainstream ecofeminism is inadequate to translate the experiences of the women of the Third World and propose postcolonial ecofeminism. The study focuses on the ecofeminist assumption of women's relationship of care and compassion with nature. Through textual examples, I show the complexity of relationships between South-Asian women, and their natural environment, and claim that these relations are based on their material conditions and social status rather than necessarily being that of care and compassion. The study also highlights the acute nature of women-nature connection in the South-Asian societies where women are treated as land: their bodies are used to reproduce, and at times leased out to earn sustenance through prostitution. I have selected multiple South-Asian texts (fiction). *Chemmeen*, *Village by the Sea*, *The Folded Earth*, and *The Hungry Tide* are used to shed light on the role of their respective authors in developing postcolonial ecofeminism. *Chemmeen*, *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Village by the Sea* are analyzed to highlight the practices of the characters, male and female, which appear to be disruptive and harmful for their natural environment that sustains them. Then I use alternative analysis that I term as postcolonial ecofeminist perspective, to interpret the practices of the characters, while considering the livelihood strategies of these characters. I provide textual examples from *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Water* to support my claim that in the presented societies, women's bodies are not just symbolically connected to land but are actually treated as land in the form of prostitution. I also analyze *Madwoman of Jogare* as a counter example that epitomizes mainstream ecofeminism, and also helps to complicate the notion of embodiment. The study also provides pedagogical implications of postcolonial ecofeminism by providing a sample reading of *Fire on the Mountain*. Besides challenging mainstream ecofeminism, all the discussed texts highlight the need for a revised ecofeminism that

encompasses the postcolonial perspective. The study also shows the rhetorical significance of such texts that may enable students in the classroom to become active members of the society who want to bring change.

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## **DEDICATION**

To my Husband and Daughter.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
DEDICATION.....	vi
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Postcolonial Feminism.....	1
Postcolonial Ecocriticism.....	2
Ecological Feminism/Ecofeminism.....	6
Toward a Postcolonial Ecofeminism.....	10
CHAPTER 2. SOUTH-ASIAN AUTHORS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO POSTCOLONIAL ECOFEMINISM.....	27
Anita Desai.....	35
Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai.....	41
Anuradha Roy.....	45
Amitav Ghosh.....	52
CHAPTER 3. WOMEN AND THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENTS.....	57
Chemmeen.....	61
The Village by the Sea.....	66
Nectar in a Sieve.....	71
CHAPTER 4. WOMEN, LAND, BODY.....	83
Nectar in a Sieve.....	86
Water.....	89
Mad Woman of Jogare.....	99
CHAPTER 5. POSTCOLONIAL ECOFEMINIST PEDAGOGY: A SAMPLE.....	108
CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION.....	129
WORKS CITED.....	135

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The nuanced nature of the postcolonial experience demands that it be scrutinized considering all its subtleties separately. As a result, under the over-arching postcolonial theory, postcolonial feminism and postcolonial ecocriticism/environment emerge. When postcolonial feminism and postcolonial ecocriticism converge, postcolonial ecofeminism takes shape. In the following sections, I give a brief overview of postcolonial feminism, postcolonial ecocriticism, and ecofeminism to ground my argument in the postcolonial ecofeminist discourse.

### Postcolonial Feminism

Postcolonial feminism is built on the belief that mainstream feminism is predominantly for white Western women. Postcolonial feminist Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse” critiques the predominantly Western feminist discourse that “colonize[s] the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular ‘Third World Woman’” (334). Western feminist writings create a homogenized ‘Third World Woman’ category that is then judged by Western standards. Consequently, ‘Third World Women’ are defined in terms of what they are not.

On the one hand, colonized men are ‘feminized’ by the colonizers to justify their oppression, on the other; colonized women are further oppressed by their own men, hence ‘doubly colonized’. By treating all colonized subjects—male and female—as feminine, women’s ‘double bind’ is swept under the rug. It is such a status of women that Gayatri Spivak calls ‘Subaltern.’ These women either do not have a voice, or even if they have it, it is not heard. In her “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak states: “Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of woman disappears, not into a pristine



nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization” (306). These women exist in realities imposed by patriarchy and/or by imperialism, at times alternatively and at others simultaneously. Postcolonial feminism sheds light on the fact that there is a difference between “‘women’ as a discursively constructed group and ‘women’ as material subjects of their own history” (Mohanty 337-338). Treating all the women of the world as a single category neglects the material conditions of the post/colonized women that are different than the material conditions of the women of the First World.

### **Postcolonial Ecocriticism**

Postcolonial ecocritical/environmental discourse also emerges out of a similar concern. Western environmentalism and ecocriticism cannot account for the postcolonial environment. Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee in his *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and Contemporary Indian Novel in English* critiques Western environmentalism for being driven by the idea of ‘preserving nature’ where nature is an extraneous entity:

...‘nature’ was extrinsic to and threatened by modern human civilization, especially by modern urban life; that north America and to some extent Western Europe could take the lead in preserving nature, that preservation of nature was important because it provided balm for the spiritual wounds of modern humankind. (20-21)

Mukherjee even criticizes the early nature writing of Aldo Leopold for his foundational text *A Sand Country Almanac*, where he suggests a way out of this situation. Leopold considers conservationism as “doomed” because scarcity of ‘nature’ in the modern life has turned it into a “commodity” that the conservationist wants to possess. Leopold provides a solution in the form of “the figure of the great landowning farmer-pioneer who is at the heart of north America’s

frontier mythologies” (22). This romanticized and ‘back-to-nature’ type of a solution according to Mukherjee is hardly possible for most people. On Leopold’s anger toward the farmer who has “‘disappeared among the landless anonymities of the Great Depression’” (qtd. in Mukherjee 23), Mukherjee poses a question that Leopold does not consider: “But what forced a man living on the margins of society to abandon his farm and join the dispossessed millions? Did his lease run out? Or could he no longer afford to run the place?” (23). For Mukherjee, there may be serious reasons behind a farmer’s act of leaving his land. These reasons most of the times are economic when a farmer cannot afford to maintain a farm. Mukherjee equally criticizes ‘deep ecology’ proposed by Arne Naess that is also built on Leopold’s idea of a ‘land ethic’ that visions community to include all natural environment. ‘Deep ecology’ calls for a harmonious co-existence of humans and the natural environment including animals, plants, and land, independent of the instrumental value of the latter. Both Leopold and Naess, according to Mukherjee, consider Western capitalism to be the cause of toxic relationship between the human and the natural environment and both suggest a similar cure to the problem—“heroic pioneer-farmer existing in small ‘self-regulating’ communities” (25). This for Mukherjee is not only too idealistic to be practiced in the modern world but also too unjustifiably universalized. If capitalism is more acutely a Western problem, as Naess acknowledges, then the solution should also be, what Dipesh Chakrabarty would call, “provincialized.” It is the “provincialized” nature of Western environmentalism and ‘deep ecology’ that calls for ‘postcolonial environment(s) and postcolonial ecocriticism.

It is a paradox, as Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley in their introduction to *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literature of the Environment* observe, that by definition ecocriticism entails the environment of the globe irrespective of the geographical boundaries and other

differences, but the practice and theory of the American ecocriticism ignores “postcolonial methodologies and contexts” (10). Going back to the critique of the ‘solution’ of the global environmental problem that Leopold and Naess suggest, it is important to remember that the environmental problems may be more or less similar in every region of the world, but all these problems cannot be cured by one remedy disregarding different causes in different regions. While proposing to consider “postcolonial methodologies and contexts” (10), DeLoughrey and Handley assert that colonialism is not a phenomenon that has affected the colonies only and consequently postcolonial ecocriticism is not only confined to the periphery:

Colonialism must not be understood as a history relegated to the periphery of Europe and the United States, but rather a process that also occurred within and that radically changed the metropolitan center. The ongoing refusal to see the interdependent histories of metropole and colony implicitly relegates postcolonial ecocriticism to the margins of Euro-American discourse. (10)

DeLoughrey and Handley’s understanding of postcolonial is different from Mukherjee’s definition of the postcolonial. DeLoughrey and Handley, in an attempt to overcome the inherent paradox in American ecocriticism of disregarding “postcolonial methodologies,” suggest that including the postcolonial perspective would encompass not only the former colonies but also the center because both the margin and the center have been affected by the colonization. This way, ecocriticism’s basic assumption of being concerned about global environment will be justified and strengthened. Hence, adding a postcolonial perspective to ecocriticism is essential for a more comprehensive ecocriticism that does not distinguish between the environment of center and that of the periphery as both have been affected by colonization. Mukherjee, however defines postcolonialism differently: “a historical condition of intensified and sustained

exploitation of the majority of humans and non-humans of the former colonies by a cartel composed of their own and ‘core’ metropolitan European/North American elites” (5). The two definitions—by DeLoughrey and Handley, and Mukherjee are not contradictory but different. Because Mukherjee, in this definition, does not talk about the effects of colonization on the center cannot mean that he denies the fact. However, the difference lies in how the terms ‘colonialism’ and ‘postcolonialism’ have been conceived in both the definitions. In DeLoughrey and Handley’s definition center and margin both are presented as affectees of colonization in the view of global environmental crisis. Mukherjee on the other hand clearly distinguishes between the two, presenting one as oppressed and the other as oppressor. For Mukherjee, post-colonization does not mean end of colonization but only a ‘shift in gear’ from a certain mode of colonization (5-6). As a result, new forms of colonization are still exploiting the so-called former colonies. This difference in determining the victim of colonization resonates the difference of opinion of many postcolonial critics regarding the postcolonial subject. For Homi K. Bhabha, for instance, postcolonial discourse comprises of both the discourse of the colonizer and the colonized (See Bhabha). For him postcolonial discourse has a unified subject. This according to JanMohamed represses the history of colonization. For a postcolonial text/discourse the subject should be the colonized. Only then the true material conditions of the oppressed can be captured (See JanMohamed).

For general postcolonial theory, the aforementioned debate makes room for the theory to expand and work in different directions. For ecocriticism however this tension brings disruption. As already said, ecocriticism calls for the globalization of the environment and ‘provincializing’ the environment might go against the spirit of ecocriticism as perceived by the pioneers. For Mukherjee the terms ‘postcolonial’ and ‘environment’ are intertwined. Postcolonial environment

is specific to postcolonial countries only. He defines environment as “the relationship between human and the non-human agents or actors that define the history of the Indian sub-continent” (5) (Mukherjee claims for his argument to be generally applicable to other parts of the world). Colonization has affected and still affects the colonized human and the non-human. Consequently, the relationship between colonized human and the non-human is affected by colonization.

Combining postcolonialism and ecocriticism for some is cumbersome. This claim is based on the assumption that postcolonialism is human-centered as opposed to ecocriticism and that ecocriticism is white male centered, so mutually both the fields are incompatible. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin in their *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* assert that these claims can easily be countered by numerous contrary examples. They suggest that a “way out of this morass is to insist that the proper subject for postcolonialism is colonialism, and to look accordingly for the colonial/imperial underpinnings of environmental practices in both ‘colonising’ and ‘colonised’ societies of the present and the past” (3). For Huggan and Tiffin then, what combines postcolonialism and ecocriticism is the fact that environmental oppression occurs because of the same colonial and imperial ideology that oppresses humans.

### **Ecological Feminism/Ecofeminism**

Just as postcolonial ecocriticism arises out of a concern that mainstream environmental discourse is predominantly Western, ecological feminism or ecofeminism asserts that the environmental discourse is male-centered. Subverting the ‘androcentric’ approach of environmentalism, ecofeminism rests on the belief that environment is a feminist issue.

Prominent American ecofeminist Karen J. Warren in her *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*

states: “Trees, forests and deforestation. Water, draught and desertification. Food production, poverty, and toxic wastes. Environmental destruction and women. And women? What do these environmental issues have to do with women?” (2). She asserts that women, especially in the Third World countries, are closer to their natural environments because of being the household managers, they are responsible for providing food, water, fuel—in short, sustenance to their families. Warren provides ample empirical data from the developing countries like India to show how women are active participants in playing out their roles as household managers and how the exploitation of these resources directly affect these women who depend on the natural resources for their survival. Such connections between environmental and feminist issues give birth to ecofeminism.

The term "Eco-feminism" was first used by the French Feminist Francois d'Eaubonne (1920-2005) in her 1974 work *Le Feminisme ou la mort* ("Feminism or Death"). It derives itself from the words 'ecology' and 'feminism', thus also referred to as ecological feminism. Ecologists view anthropocentrism as a threat to environment for it creates a dualism of humanity/nature where it views humanity superior to nature; ecofeminists on the other hand incorporate feminist concerns of man/woman dualism and see androcentric approach as a threat to both environment and women for women have always been associated with nature and thus both have been suppressed by male- centered society (Garrard 23; Tong 242-243).

Women and nature are associated in almost every society. Val Plumwood, a renowned ecofeminist philosopher in her *Feminism and Mastery of Nature* also provides multiple

examples<sup>1</sup> as evidence for traditional women-nature connectedness and considers it a tool for female oppression:

Nature, as the excluded and devalued contrast of reason, includes the emotions, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilized, the nonhuman world, matter, physicality and sense experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality, of faith and of madness. In other words, nature includes everything that reason excludes. (19-20)

So, there exists a reason/nature dualism where everything related to culture and reason is 'male', 'human' and 'civilized' while everything that is related to nature is 'feminine,' 'nonhuman' and 'primitive' (45).

Plumwood acknowledges that women have been culturally associated with nature and this association has resulted in 'othering' of both women and nature. This exclusion and denial repudiates women's entry into the "master model" which is a synonym for "human model" and any feminism that champions women's "full humanity" without challenging this model is shallow and inadequate (23). Plumwood suggests that ecofeminism should actually be called to the aid of feminism because it can provide an "escape route to the problematic that the traditional association between woman and nature creates for feminists, to a position which neither accepts women's exclusion from reason, nor accepts the construction of nature as inferior"(20).

Plumwood is not only critical of the equality feminists who simply deny woman-nature association and raise women to the status of "reason" and "rationality" but also condemns those

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<sup>1</sup> Plumwood gives examples from various prominent authors from history who connect women and nature: "I cannot conceive of you to be human creatures, but a sort of species hardly a degree above a monkey' [Swift 1989:191; 'Women represent the interests of the family and sexual life; the work of civilisation has become more and more men's business' [Freud 1989:80]; 'Women are certainly capable of learning, but they are not made for the higher forms of science, such as philosophy and certain types of creative activity [Hegel 1989:62]" (19).

ecofeminists who endorse the idea of woman- nature connectedness "without critically examining how the association is produced by exclusion" (20). Plumwood's idea resonates to an extent with Ruether's claim from 1979:

Women have also been identified with nature, the earth, and the body in its despised and rejected form. To simply reject this identification would be to neglect that part of ourselves we have been left to cultivate and to buy into that very polarization of which we have been the primary victims. (51)

This poses a challenge for cultural feminists<sup>2</sup>. Uncritically endorsing women's closeness to nature brings backlash from those who consider it as an essentialist claim, Simon de Beauvoir being one strong critic. Braidotti et al. in their *Women, the Environment and Sustainable Development* observe that culturally and spiritually oriented American feminists like Daly, Griffin, Morgan and Rich celebrate "greater humanism, pacifism, nurturance and spiritual development...And all this because women are closer to nature" (68). It is on the basis of women-nature connectedness, women's closeness to nature, and the domination of both by a male-centered society that environmentally concerned feminists and ecofeminists believe that liberation of one means the liberation of the other.

In this regard, Ruether pointed out that there can be no liberation for women and no solution for ecological crisis until the "fundamental model of relationship" in a society continues to be that of male domination ("Motherearth" 204). Since then many ecofeminists have endorsed Ruether's basic idea that the environment is a feminist issue. Ynestra King in 1976 developed the term ecofeminism into a concept at the Institute for Social Ecology in Vermont and the concept

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<sup>2</sup> Those feminists who cherish women-nature connectedness, including other undervalued female attributes.



turned into a movement in 1980 with a conference on “Women and Life on Earth: Ecofeminism in the '80's” (Merchant 184).

### **Toward a Postcolonial Ecofeminism**

Postcolonial ecofeminism has roots in both postcolonial feminism and postcolonial ecocriticism. Postcolonial feminism rests on the fact that Western feminism does not suffice for all the women of the world. Similarly, postcolonial ecocriticism rests on the belief that typically American ecocriticism is inadequate for the Third World. A postcolonial ecofeminism takes the concern of both postcolonial feminism and postcolonial ecocriticism to establish that material conditions of the women of the third world determine their relationship with their environment, while critiquing the inadequacy of ecological feminism/ecofeminism for the women of the Third World.

Material conditions of the (post)colonized, men and women, are the direct outcome of their status as colonized. Mukherjee’s definition of postcolonialism as “intensified and sustained exploitation of the human and the non-human” (5) sheds ample light on the strategy of the colonizers. They oppress both the human and the non-human alike and for them both serve as resources to be exploited. Relating all those that the colonizers want to oppress, to nature/non-human provides logic of domination to the colonizer. Nature, according to anthropologist Sherry B. Ortner is one common devalued entity in every culture. Culture in contrast is considered superior, hence creating a dualism of culture/nature. In order to establish their superiority, men relate themselves to culture and everything else to nature that they consider inferior to them, including women. This as a result creates a connection between nature and women. Connecting animals and all the weak that would include women, people of color, children, underclass, people with different sexual orientations is not a new phenomenon either (see Gaard; Warren); hence,

grouping all the oppressed humans and non-humans together and associating them with nature. Consequently, culture/nature dualism also implies man/woman, man/nature, master/slave, superior/inferior, colonizer/colonized dualisms where former is always considered better than the latter. Dualism according to Val Plumwood is neither a simple dichotomy nor an ordinary set of binary oppositions. It, on the contrary, "results from a certain kind of denied dependency on a subordinated other" (41). So, in the dualisms of man/woman, it is always men's denial of their dependence on women that makes them exclude women from the master or the human model (Plumwood 23).

Like ecocriticism, that champions the cause of global environmental crisis irrespective of geographical boundaries, ecofeminism rests on the assertion that "it transcends differences of class, age, and ethnicity between women...Ecofeminism is more than an identity politics, it reaches for an earth democracy, across cultures and species" (Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics* ix-x). The reason for ecofeminism to disregard all types of differences among women of the world, according to Salleh is that it "put[s] life before freedom" (ix). Another very pertinent reason for ecofeminism to consider all women of the world as one category is because "we find women subordinated to men in every known society" (Ortner 8). According to Ortner the reason for every society to devalue women and consider them subordinate to men is that "woman is being identified with, or ...seems to be a symbol of, something that every culture devalues... that every culture defines as being at a lower order of existence than itself... there is only one thing that would fit that category, and that is "nature" in the most generalized sense (10). Women's association with nature being the most obvious cause of women's inferior status in every society is another reason for ecofeminism to consider all the women having the same fate.

Ecofeminism builds on the belief that women-nature connection exists and the liberation of both goes hand in hand. This one agreed upon fact leads to two different approaches in ecofeminist debate. One group of ecofeminists argues that these connections are culturally constructed and result of women's socialization. Carolyn Merchant, Val Plumwood, Karen Warren and many others are proponents of this school. There is yet another group that believes that women are inherently close to nature as they share their reproductive quality with nature. Within this second group is a category of spiritual ecofeminists who believe that women are spiritually close to nature. Despite all the difference within ecofeminism, it is accepted that because women have been socially put in a situation where they are close to nature as household managers and caretakers of the family, their attitude to and relationship with nature is also different than that of men. Because they work in close proximity with nature and acknowledge their dependence on it for their sustenance, they have an attitude of care and compassion toward nature. (For many ecofeminists, like Carolyn Merchant and Val Plumwood, this is not only a quality of women; men are equally capable of showing care and compassion to nature but because they have been socialized to consider nature inferior, they hesitate to show any concern for nature.) It is because of this ecofeminist assumption of women being more caring and compassionate toward nature as compared to men that the universality of ecofeminist assumptions becomes controversial.

The universality of man/woman or culture/nature dualism brings about the debate about the universality of the oppression of women and nature in every society. Karen Warren has argued that 'cultural feminists' "ignore the struggles of women of color to assert their ethnic identities against the imperialism of Western rationalism" (qtd. in Braidotti et. al. 71). So, within Western cultures there is a difference in how white women and the women of color struggle for

their liberation. White women have to fight on only one front—gender; women of color on the other hand also have to fight for their ethnic identities. Similarly, women from the ‘global south’ (a term generally used for Asia, Africa and South America; see Mukherjee) do not share their experiences of oppression with the Euro-North-American women. These women are in a double bind where, on the one hand they may belong to a nation/caste/class that is oppressed and on the other hand they belong to a gender that is oppressed. Mukherjee argues that even the global ‘north’ and ‘south’ cannot be dichotomized as rich and poor. To prove his point that the global ‘south’ is not homogenously poor, he gives the examples of Indian “cybercities” and “entrepreneurs who crowd to the top of the annual *Forbes*’ rich list;” Brazilians’ costs on “cosmetic surgeries” that are greater than the governments budget of water and electricity; “African mansions;” Saudians’ and Chinese’s shopping trips to London and Paris (33). Mukherjee considers this as “essential feature of global capitalism—its tendency to develop pockets of extreme wealth and vast swathes of poverty *simultaneously* on local, national and global levels” (33). So one may belong to an oppressed nation/class/caste and gender but there are further hierarchies within nation/class/caste and gender. (Mukherjee primarily makes this claim for the environmental and ecological debate around the ‘south’ but it can be appropriated for the ecofeminist debate of the ‘south’ too.)

Ecofeminists like Ariel Salleh recognize the hierarchy of oppression in certain societies but it does not make any difference to the central assumption that both women and nature are equally treated in a patriarchal society. Ariel Salleh who claims for the universality of ecofeminism acknowledges that women in almost every society are at the bottom of hierarchical structures of oppression along with nature as another devalued entity: “Some kinds of domination penetrate the conditions of life more deeply than others... A given woman after all,

may suffer on account of gender, class predation, environmental poisoning, and postcolonial status (*Ecofeminism as Politics* x). Historically, ecofeminism developed as a movement that considered all the marginalized women of the world and tried to give solution to the global environmental crisis. Braidotti et.al. while drawing the trajectory of women's struggle for the sustainable environment observe:

Northern women and development experts, women experts who had moved into professional environmental fields such as forestry, agriculture, water system engineering, and women leaders from the South gradually joined forces and drew international attention to the problems of poor women in the South...together they created a space for a large variety of women...to voice their concerns in international fora which discussed solutions to the global environmental crisis. (2)

This observation calls for the same critique that Mukherjee has had for the homogenized status of the 'South.' It can be argued that "poor women in the South" is not one uniform category that can be looked after by the "experts" to solve "the global environmental crisis." Ortner's anthropological observation about varying status of women in every society is apt here:

The secondary status of woman in society is one of the true universals; a pan-cultural fact. Yet within that universal fact the specific cultural conceptions and symbolizations of women are incredibly diverse and even mutually contradictory. Further, the actual treatment of women and the relative power and contribution of women vary enormously from culture to culture and over different periods in the history of particular cultural traditions. (5)

In this useful observation, Ortner makes three points: a) women's inferior status as compared to men; b) diverse cultural assumptions about women's status; c) actual treatment of women, and

their power and contribution. The third point—‘actual treatment of women, and their power and contribution’— is very significant for my argument. Women’s inferior status and cultural assumptions about their status are the discursive constructions about women’s status. The actual treatment of women, and their power and contribution in the society are their material conditions. What challenges the feminist assumptions of ‘Third World’ women being a unified category, and ecofeminist assumptions of all the women of the world being one unified group based on their collective fate, is the fact that material conditions of women globally and even within same cultures and societies may vary depending on their ‘treatment’ and respective ‘power’ and ‘contribution’. It is the difference of material conditions of the women of the ‘south’ that also challenges the ecofeminist assumption of women being caring and compassionate for nature because of their socialization as being ‘close to nature.’ To reiterate, I argue that women’s inferior status in every society and their association with nature is universal, as ecofeminists would have it, but their relationship with nature as that of care and compassion resulting from their association and proximity with nature is contestable. This points toward the inadequacy of Western ecofeminism and a need for postcolonial ecofeminism.

Postcolonial ecofeminism would demand a critical analysis of women-nature relationship. Western ecofeminists’ assumption about the difference in men’s and women’s attitude toward nature and women’s relationship of care and compassion for nature cannot be uncritically applied on the women of the Third World. As already mentioned, Western ecofeminism is inadequate to translate Third World women’s relationship with their natural environments because it ignores the material and historical conditions of the women of the Third World. Also, ‘Third World woman’ is not a unified category as Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues. West’s narrative about a unified ‘Third World woman’ helps it construct a discourse of

‘otherness’ where ‘Third World woman’ is judged against the women of the First World. Western feminist discourse, according to Mohanty ignores the material and historical conditions of the Third World women that results in rejecting the difference between the First and the Third World women, where the standard is the First World woman. The difference is rejected as backwardness or underdevelopment on the part of the Third World women. Similarly, when the Western ecofeminists don’t understand the complex relationship of the Third World women with their natural environment, they may reject it as ‘internalized oppression’ or ‘oppressive othering’ (See Fanon) where these women are conditioned to devalue women and nature.

In order to understand the complex and ambivalent attitudes of the Third World women toward their natural environments, it is important to remember and acknowledge their status as (post)colonized. Stuart Hall and Homi K. Bhabha have thoroughly explicated the hybrid nature of colonized subjects. Hall in his “Cultural Studies and Diaspora” gives two different definitions of cultural identity:

‘cultural identity’ in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective one ‘true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with shared history and ancestry hold in common... There is however, a second... view of cultural identity ... [which] recognizes that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitutes ‘what we really are’; or rather—since history has intervened—‘what we have become’... Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. (223-225)

According to Hall, cultural identity of the colonized also comprises of what they have been forced to become. For Bhabha, the colonized carve out a “Third Space” for themselves where

they combine their home culture and the imposed culture to navigate through their circumstances. So Hall's second definition of 'cultural identity' and Bhabha's "Third Space" theory imply that every action of the colonized men and women is based on not only what they want to do but also on what they have been forced to do by their circumstances.

On the one hand, feminists and ecofeminists reject the difference of attitude on the part of Third World women in favor of a Western feminism and ecofeminism; on the other hand, some critics of ecofeminism, like Bronwyn James, question the relevance of ecofeminism in situations where practices of the women of the 'south' may clash with the expectations of the ecofeminists from women of showing an ethic of care for the environment/nature. In her "Is Ecofeminism relevant?" Bronwyn contends: "By conflating nature with the environment, ecofeminists have obscured the fact that the environment is politically and historically constructed" (11). She makes a strong argument on the basis of this observation. She argues that women's attitude toward their environment is not based on their so-called relationship of care and compassion with nature; it has other factors to be looked at: "Firstly, it is important to examine the specific resource use context within which this interaction takes place. Secondly, different women's environmental relations are determined by the social relations of power of gender, race, age, and status which shape both differential material conditions and the gender division of labour (10). Although James supports her argument by a case study on the commercial harvesters of medicinal plants in Mabibi, South Africa, she suggests that her framework can also be applied to other women's relationship with their environments.

In a situation where ecofeminist analysis is inadequate or irrelevant, James proposes an "alternate analysis" that would "include an examination of women's livelihood strategies within the context of the social relations of power which ultimately determines different women's



choices and behaviour” (15). I use a similar ‘alternative analysis’ strategy to look at the role of female characters of the different texts to show that the women in fisher and agrarian communities have diverse relationships with their environment on the basis of their respective “power” and “contribution” (Ortner 2) that they make toward the livelihood of their families.

The fictional characters that I use as the subjects of analysis are all life like characters that represent the actual societies that the texts portray. These life like fictional characters help in the cultural analysis of the texts and on the basis of the analysis I argue that in agrarian and fishing communities in South-Asia, especially India, the relative “power” that women have and the “contribution” that they make in the economic lives of the families raises questions for the environment oriented feminists and ecofeminists who tend to consider ‘poor women of the south’ as a uniform category. By giving examples from the selected texts, I intend to show that these women do not always have a typical relationship with nature that the environment-oriented feminists and ecofeminists believe in. The women in fishing and agrarian societies have important roles to play that at times resemble a lot with men’s roles in the same societies. They are either helping hands of their men, or in certain situations, in-charge of the economic affairs of their respective families. In such instances, their attitude toward nature is not necessarily different from that of men’s attitude toward nature.

One basic reason for the assumption of women’s ‘closeness’ with nature as compared to men, according to Paul Mohai in his “Men Women, and the Environment: An Examination of the Gender Gap in Environmental Concern and Activism” is women’s “motherhood mentality” that they develop because of their socialization as nurturers and caretakers of the family. Men on the other hand, because of their social role as breadwinners, have “marketplace mentality” that “gives priority to economic growth and development and that may portray environmental

pollution as a necessary tradeoff for growth” (2). However, the material conditions of men and women in the (post)colonized societies are most of the times not extremely different from each other. Women in most circumstances, especially in fishing and agrarian societies, are as involved in the economic affairs of the family as men. This observation not only challenges ecofeminist assumption of the difference in men and women’s attitude toward environment but also questions the assumption of women’s attitude of care and compassion toward nature because of their ‘closeness’ to nature.

A lack of difference in women and men’s attitude toward nature in downtrodden societies does not eliminate women’s inferior status in these societies. These women share their oppression with the men of their society on the hands of the colonizer (neo-colonizer?); they also get their due share of oppression by the men of their society—hence they are ‘doubly colonized.’ Considering the ‘double bind’ of women and the colonized status of men of the global ‘south’, it is important to remember that both women and men of the ‘south’ are inferior to the women and men of the ‘North’. In this dichotomy women and men of the ‘south’ represent nature; women and men of the ‘North’ represent culture in the culture/nature dualism. Within the ‘South’, as in ‘North’, there is a culture/nature dualism where the elite of the society represent culture and the poor of the society represent nature. Among the poor of the poor ‘South’ too, culture/nature dualism exists. Both men and women in such societies live in close proximity with nature, as in fishing and agrarian societies, and depend on it for its sustenance. However, women in such societies, despite their ‘power’ and contribution’ to the society are still some degrees less than men and related to nature, as it provides logic of domination to the oppressor.

Women-nature connectedness among the poor of the poor (read Third World women) is also unique in nature, just like the unusual women-nature relationship in these societies. Karen J.

Warren in her *Environmental Ecological Philosophies* identifies eight women nature connections that I summarize below.

1. Historical, Typically Causal Connections: Historical data concerning the domination of women and nature shows that this twin domination is actually an outcome of patriarchal culture (xi).
2. Conceptual Connections: The connection between woman-nature domination is actually embedded in the socially constructed conceptual frameworks which are again related to the patriarchal culture. Metaphors of "up" and "down", "low" and "high" easily explain the problem. Everything that is "up" and "high" is "male" or associated with the "male"; and everything that is feminine or "Nature" is "low" (xi- xii).
3. Empirical and Experiential Connections: Empirical data shows the links between women (and children, people of color, the underclass) and the environmental destruction. All the environmental policies and even policies regarding health directly influence women, children and the underclass (xiii-xiv).
4. Symbolic Connections: The symbolic devaluation of both women and nature has been identified that appears in religion, art and literature. Literary works and art pieces are scrutinized by the ecofeminists to see how women and nature are not only linked but also inferiorized. Nature, for instance, is always referred to in female sexual terms like virgin land, barren soil etc. similarly women are often referred to in animal terms like cats, cows, birds etc. (xiv-xv).
5. Epistemological Connections: All the above mentioned connections have given rise to the need for ecofeminist epistemologies which must question rationalism in the Western

philosophical tradition and should break value dualisms and hierarchies concerning women and nature (xiv).

6. Political Connections: The term "ecofeminism" was first introduced by Françoise d'Eaubonne to highlight the fact that women had the potential to bring ecological revolution. Thus the movement has always been primarily political (xvi- xvii).
7. Ethical Connections: The aim of ecofeminist environmental ethics is to develop theories and practices regarding women, animals and the rest of nature, which are not male biased (xv).
8. Theoretical Connections: Various alleged connections between women and nature have given rise to different feminist as well as environmental theories and approaches, consequentialist and nonconsequentialist approaches being two heads covering many (xv-xvi).

Considering Warren's data regarding women-nature connection is important as some general criticism on ecofeminism questions the universality of women-nature connectedness. Eminent ecofeminists like Val Plumwood also agree that women-nature connectedness is not a universal phenomenon as there might be some societies that do not associate women with nature, but she contends that in most of the societies, especially Western societies, women-nature connection is a fact and one of the biggest causes of their twin oppression.

Warren's women-nature connection list and Ortner's anthropological observation about women-nature connectedness makes women's association with nature in most societies evident. However, the symbolic connection between women and nature, where nature is feminized and women are naturalized, is highly debated in feminist and ecofeminist discourse. This view is considered essentialist that claims that since nature is associated with women and women have

bodies, so has nature. Views are divided as to whether ecofeminists should accept women-nature embodiment or not. Feminist theologian Sigridur Gudmarsdottir in her "Rapes of Earth and Grapes of Wrath: Steinbeck, Ecofeminism and the Metaphor of Rape" especially probes the metaphor of rape as used for both land and women. She asserts that it not only signals women's connectedness to nature but also intensifies personal female experiences of violence to a universal level (206). Gudmarsdottir critiques ecofeminism for its endorsement of women-nature connectedness and believes that metaphor of rape does not serve any purpose to combat the environmental crisis and argues that "without an acute awareness of genuine suffering of particular bodies, raped, tortured and violated by particular oppressors in a particular time and place, the [rape] metaphor loses its referent and conveys neither justice for women nor nature" (211). Gudmarsdottir rejects symbolic women-nature connection that reinforces women-nature embodiment. On the contrary, environmental philosopher Terri Field in her "Is the Body Essential for Ecofeminism?" takes an ambivalent stance by claiming to be a non-essentialist ecofeminist, yet considers body to be essential for ecofeminism. She suggests that environmental philosophers should theorize embodiment from an ecofeminist perspective. She stresses the need for a "deconstructive approach to the body" which will help ecofeminists, like radical feminists, to reclaim women's bodies. Once the embodiment is theorized, the mind/body dualism can easily be deconstructed (39-40). Field's argument here echoes Plumwood's assertion about endorsing women-nature connectedness. Plumwood considers this essential for dismantling culture/nature dualism.

Essentialist or non-essentialist, Western ecofeminism considers embodiment of women and nature as symbolic. However 'Third World' women's connection with nature is unique, especially in what Warren would call a 'symbolic' connection. In 'symbolic' women-nature

connection, women are only metaphorically referred to in terms that are specific for non-human. Land on the other hand is feminized because of land's and women's reproductive ability. I argue, for a postcolonial ecofeminism, that for the women of the 'Third World' the connection between women and land is not merely symbolic and metaphoric. Women-nature embodiment justifies treatment of both alike. Women's bodies are actually treated as land—for their sustenance value, in the form of prostitution. Not only that women's bodies reproduce like land, these bodies can also be 'leased out' like land to provide sustenance to the families. Acts of prostitution in such cases are at times enforced by both patriarchy and circumstances and at others by circumstances only.

For my dissertation, my central argument is that predominantly Western ecofeminism lacks a postcolonial perspective and fails to understand the material conditions of the women of the 'Third World' in favor of a unified category—'woman.' Under this argument, I make two further claims. A) Ecofeminist assumption of women's attitude of care and compassion toward their natural environment because of their socialization as nurturers and caretakers as a universal is contestable. Women in the Third World societies show attitudes that are contrary to this assumption. B) The so-called symbolic women-nature connection, that some feminists and ecofeminists consider rejecting as it reinforces women's oppression, in many Third World societies is not merely symbolic. When women are referred to in non-human terms, this reference is more than metaphoric. Women's bodies are actually used as a commodity, like land that can provide sustenance by being 'leased out'.

This is a qualitative research that studies multiple South-Asian literary texts (fiction). The texts include *The Village by the Sea* and *The Fire on the Mountain* by Anita Desai, *Folded Earth* by Anuradha Roy, *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh, *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala

Markhandaya, *Mad Woman of Jogare* by Sohaila Abdulali, *Water* by Bapsi Sidhwa, and *Chemmeen* by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai. To develop the theoretical framework for the analysis of selected texts, I have used postcolonial ecocriticism and postcolonial feminist theory to establish postcolonial ecofeminism. This theoretical framework is then applied to the texts to show the inadequacy of Western ecofeminism as universal and will propose that there is room for ecofeminism to expand and incorporate postcolonial ecofeminism within the field.

The Dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction of the dissertation where I establish my theoretical framework for postcolonial ecofeminism. This chapter synthesizes relevant theoretical perspectives from postcolonial, postcolonial feminist, postcolonial ecocritical, and ecofeminist theory to develop postcolonial ecofeminist perspective to use as analytical tool in the following chapters.

Chapter 2 looks at the contributions of the authors, both male and female whose works are analyzed in the subsequent chapters, in understanding women-nature relationship and women-nature connection in the rural agrarian and fishing societies of South-Asia. This chapter probes into whether these authors conform to the Western ecofeminist assumptions of a relationship of care and compassion toward nature or what they present is contradictory. The chapter highlights the contribution of Anita Desai, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, Anuradha Roy, and Amitav Ghosh in the postcolonial environmental discourse that makes room for postcolonial ecofeminism. All these authors link together, in their works, the fates of people with that of the environment. They stress the colonized and oppressed nature of the postcolonial environment in their respective settings that in turn affects the lives of the downtrodden individuals of the society.

Chapter 3 and 4 are detailed analyses of the texts. Chapter 3 gives textual examples to question the adequacy of Western ecofeminism. It also applies the alternative analysis that postcolonial ecofeminism provides to interpret the practices of the Third World women that the texts present. *Chemmeen*, *Nectar in a Sieve*, and *The Village by the Sea* are analyzed. Through the textual analysis, it is shown that the practices of women and men in their respective societies are determined by their material circumstances. Their practices then are seen from an alternative analysis that helps in understanding their relationship with their environment. The analysis helps in determining the fact that the apparently harmful practices of the women and at times men are not the result of internalized oppression or oppressive othering but because of their social and economic status that is determined by their status as (post)colonized.

Chapter 4 focuses on one specific aspect of ecofeminism—embodiment of women and nature especially land. By giving textual examples, this chapter shows that women and land are not only symbolically associated, as Western ecofeminism would have it; women’s bodies in the downtrodden postcolonial societies are literally treated as land—a commodity that provides sustenance. *Water* and *Nectar in a Sieve* are analyzed to provide textual examples to show the treatment of women’s bodies. Ecofeminism considers ‘feminizing nature’ and ‘naturalizing women’ as a symbolic connection between women and nature that is usually found in religion, literature and arts. The textual analysis in this chapter shows that this connection is not merely symbolic; women’s bodies are actually commodified and treated as land is used—for its instrumental value

Chapter 5 sheds light on the significance of ecofeminism as a literary analytical tool. Ecofeminism is not only a philosophy but rhetoric as well. This is the reason that including ecofeminist literary analysis as a pedagogical tool in the classroom may bring about a change



that may help in creating a sustainable world that ecofeminists dream about. Incorporating such texts (that yield ecofeminist analysis) in the syllabus at all levels of education can create ecofeminist consciousness among readers to make more environmentally aware citizens of the world. Since literary canon has expanded to include Third World literature, it is important to make literary analytical tools equally comprehensive.

All the texts discussed in the chapters provide rich cultural analysis that helps develop a postcolonial ecofeminist perspective. Besides challenging mainstream ecofeminism, these texts highlight the need for a revised ecofeminism that encompasses the postcolonial perspective. The study provides ample data to show the especial relevance of ecofeminism in South-Asian societies where the fate of women, children, and the underclass is linked with that of the environment. It also shows the rhetorical significance of such texts that may enable students in the classroom to become active members of the society who want to bring change.

## CHAPTER 2. SOUTH-ASIAN AUTHORS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO POSTCOLONIAL ECOFEMINISM

In this chapter I look at the contribution that South-Asian fiction writers—Anita Desai, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, Anuradha Roy, and Amitav Ghosh— make in developing postcolonial ecofeminism. I specifically highlight the ways the authors portray the women-nature connection and a women-nature relationship in the postcolonial societies that their representative texts present. This chapter includes two authors—Anita Desai and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai whose work is also discussed in chapter 3, while the other two authors, Anuradha Roy and Amitav Ghosh are only discussed in this chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to draw an overall framework of postcolonial ecofeminism using these authors to develop it. Chapter 3 and 4 are more focused close reading of the texts to show how the selected works challenge one or the other assumption of mainstream ecofeminism.

Commonly, works of South-Asian female authors, just as the works of any female author from any other part of the world, are considered appropriate sources for feminist analysis. The reader however, not only *applies* a theoretical framework to the text but also approaches the text with some preconceived cultural notions, and often a conflicting analysis ensues. Amar Nath Prasad in part one of his four-part edited collection *New Lights on Indian Women Novelists in English* introduces Indian women as “the embodiment of love and affection, hope and patience” (1), and later adds “sincerity and purity” as “the core of an ideal Indian woman” (4). For a feminist reader, this may rightly sound essentialist but such is the cultural identity of not only Indian but also of almost all South-Asian women. Prasad’s anthology presents chapters on the works of almost all eminent Indian female fiction writers including Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, and many more. Since there are numerous contributors writing from

different standpoints, one prominent pattern in the contributed chapters is looking at the works from feminist perspective. In his introductory chapter Prasad also focuses on a similar theme that the female authors work with: “Indian women novelists in English and other vernaculars, try their best to deal with, apart from many other things, the pathetic plight of forsaken women who are fated to suffer from birth to death” (2). It is interesting to note however that on the one hand Prasad cherishes an ideal Indian female character, on the other hand he considers the works of Indian female authors as a feminist would do. What he seems to miss while converging the two is that this image of an ‘ideal Indian female’ many times becomes the cause of the oppression of women, including the women characters presented in the novels that the chapters study. Thus, approaching a text with preconceived cultural notions about women and seeing it from a feminist perspective may be contradictory. Conversely, uncritical acceptance of a theoretical lens that undermines cherished cultural norms may also be problematic. It is for the same reason that postcolonial feminism takes shape.

Just as mainstream feminism yields contradictory analyses in the South-Asian settings, mainstream ecofeminism is also inadequate to be applied to the South-Asian settings. The clash between an ideal Indian female character and feminism can be paralleled to the clash between the material conditions of South-Asian women and the ideals of mainstream ecofeminism. The way it is difficult to visualize emancipated South-Asian women who also are an epitome of culturally accepted feminine role; it is equally hard to reconcile the environmental practices and choices of South-Asian women with the ecofeminist ideals of the west. One of the most important reasons of the clash between the latter is the postcolonial status of South-Asian women. As discussed in chapter 1, postcolonial experience of men and women in the Third World countries has shaped their identities in ways that cannot be completely understood

disregarding the postcolonial context. I do not disagree with Bina Agarwal<sup>3</sup>, Partha Chatterjee<sup>4</sup> and Ijaz Ahmed<sup>5</sup> who claim that the people of the former colonies should not only be considered as (post)colonized people since they have their independent identities too, before any colonial experience. At the same time, I stress that the colonial experience of the men and women of the former colonies has affected, and still affects them in the form of neo-colonialism so much so that disregarding their postcolonial status may result in inadequate understanding of their actions and choices.

The selected authors whose works help to develop and explicate a postcolonial ecofeminism have presented their characters in the environments that have mostly been politically created for them. These characters are not to be seen as farmers, peasants, or fishers who are living in perfect harmony with nature. On the contrary, the characters are constantly employing survival tactics that at times contribute in betterment of the environment and at others in its deterioration. The texts portray two main points of contradiction between the practices and choices of these characters and the ecofeminist ideals of the west: (a) that ecofeminism claims that those who are socialized to live close to nature have a capacity to show care and compassion toward nature but the practices and choices of those who live in close proximity with nature in the downtrodden South-Asian societies present contrary examples to this claim, and (b) that mainstream ecofeminism considers feminizing nature and naturalizing women as merely symbolic that we come across in religion, art and literature etc., but in the South-Asian societies

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<sup>3</sup> Agarwal in her "The gender and environment debate: lessons from India" contends that oppression through colonial experience is not the only experience, colonized people also have a history of oppression through local oppressive structures.

<sup>4</sup> In *Nation and its Fragments*, Chatterjee claims that an Indian national cultural identity predated any colonial or imperial rule.

<sup>5</sup> Ijaz Ahmed in his "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness" asserts that the Third World should not only be considered for its colonial experience.

this relationship is more than just symbolic, women are actually treated as land where their bodies are used to reproduce, and are also 'leased out' in the form of prostitution to provide means of sustenance. Where (a) might appear challenging and rejecting ecofeminism altogether, (b) stresses the need for a revised ecofeminism that encompasses the ambivalent relationship of the women of the Third World with their environment and also considers the acute and damaging nature of a women-nature connection in the Third World countries.

The revised ecofeminism, that understands and incorporates (a) and (b), creates theoretical space for a postcolonial ecofeminism. Two prominent figures in understanding South-Asian ecofeminist discourse are Vandana Shiva and Bina Agarwal. The former stands for ecofeminism and the latter critiques and challenges ecofeminism. Vandana Shiva, a renowned Indian environmental activist and anti-globalization author considers the Western developmental plans for the Third World as more harmful than beneficial: "development could not but entail destruction for women, nature and subjugate cultures, which is why, throughout the third world, women, peasants and tribals are struggling for liberation from development just as they earlier struggled for liberation from colonialism" (Shiva, *Staying Alive 2*). Shiva sees the developmental plans in the Third World as continuation of the colonization process that expands the wealth of the colonizer and produces more poverty for the colonized, hence calls it 'maldevelopment'. Despite her first-hand knowledge about the plight of women and the poor in India, Shiva is still criticized for considering all the women as a unified category who have "special empathetic and nurturing capacities in relation to nature" (Braidotti et.al. 2), that Shiva calls 'feminine principle'. She has also been critiqued for her uncritical assumption that the indigenous conceptual frameworks are "'gender-egalitarian', 'nonhierarchical' and 'environmentally harmonious'" (James 10). For Shiva, Western developmental plans as reflection of their

patriarchal ideologies are the root cause of ‘maldevelopment’ in the Third World countries, destroying their indigenous cultures that valued ‘feminine principle’. She asserts that both conceptually and materially, women in India are close to nature: “Women in India are an intimate part of nature, both in imagination and in practice. At, one level nature is symbolized as the embodiment of the feminine principle, and at another, she is nurtured by the feminine to produce life and provide sustenance” (Shiva, *Staying Alive* 37). Shiva blames Western patriarchal structures for disturbing this harmonious relationship of women and nature that the entire indigenous culture celebrated.

Bina Agarwal, an Indian development economist, strongly critiques ecofeminism and instead proposes ‘feminist environmentalism’. She finds ecofeminism problematic and details the problems in her “The Gender and Environment Debate: Lessons from India:”

First, it [ecofeminism] posits "woman" as a unitary category...Second, it locates the domination of women and of nature almost solely in ideology... Third, even in the realm of ideological constructs, it says little (...) about the social, economic, and political structures within which these constructs are produced and transformed. Nor does it address the central issue of the means by which certain dominant groups (...) are able to bring about ideological shifts...Fourth, the ecofeminist argument does not take into account women's lived material relationship with nature...Fifth, those strands of ecofeminism that trace the connection between women and nature to biology may be seen as adhering to a form of essentialism. (122-123)

Among the five problems that Agarwal notes in her analysis of ecofeminism, some have already been addressed by the ecofeminists while some are still valid. She justifiably claims that ecofeminism considers “women” as a unified category. Among other ecofeminists, Ariel Salleh

responds to this problem claiming that the reason ecofeminism disregards the differences is that it considers “life before freedom” (*Ecofeminism as Politics* ix). Agarwal’s second objection also underscores the need for a postcolonial ecofeminism. Val Plumwood is among the top-notch ecofeminist philosophers and she also considers women-nature connection and their twin domination resulting from the dualistic thinking of the west (See Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*). Karen Warren also finds a women-nature connection embedded in conceptual frameworks of the patriarchal society (See Warren, *Environmental Feminist Philosophies*). About the third objection, Agarwal herself acknowledges Carolyn Merchant’s analysis that looks at the ideological basis of the domination of women and nature (See Merchant, *The Death of Nature*). Her fourth objection that ecofeminism does not take into account “women’s lived material relationship with nature” underscores my analysis of material conditions and their effect on environmental behaviors. Ecofeminist analyses interpret women-nature relationship from a theoretical lens; disregarding women’s lived experiences (for example while attempting to analyze ‘chipko’ movement in India, the ecofeminists have interpreted women’s act of hugging the trees to prevent tree felling as women’s care and compassion for nature, disregarding the material cause of women’s actions). Her fifth objection is also valid but because she herself acknowledges that some ‘strands’ of ecofeminism indulge in essentialism, it cannot be generalized for all forms of ecofeminism. Ecofeminists like Greta Gaard strongly object the essentialist assumptions of cultural ecofeminists (see Gaard, “Ecofeminism Revisited”).

Agarwal believes that in order to challenge the problematic nature of ecofeminism that rests in the ideologically constructed gender relationships, theoretical understanding of “the political economy of ideological construction” is necessary (123). That is, it is important to see

how certain discourses, that privilege one gender over the other, get prevalence and promotion. She also stresses the need to critically examine the material reality of women-nature relationship that may differ depending on the caste and race of women and may also affect the responses of women toward their natural environment respectively. The question that Agarwal raises then is: “Are there *gendered* aspects to these responses? If so, in what are these responses rooted?” (123). Postcolonial ecofeminism can provide answers to these questions. Considering patriarchal ideology that connects and inferiorizes women and nature, and the material conditions under which women and men work and establish their relationship with nature responds to Agarwal’s objections.

Agarwal criticizes Vandana Shiva for not considering the underlying causes of women’s responses toward and relationship with their environment. Shiva, according to Agarwal, considers South-Asian women as a unified category, like Western ecofeminists who consider all women as one group. Agarwal labels Shiva as an essentialist who considers women to have a special relationship with nature that then endows them with a specialized knowledge about nature. Agarwal is not hesitant to agree that some women might have a specialized knowledge about their natural environment who live and work in a natural environment, but she strongly rejects the essentialist argument supporting this claim. The only difference that Agarwal sees in Shiva and the Western ecofeminists is that Shiva considers Western developmental plans in the former colonies as the root cause of ‘the death of feminine principle’ in the indigenous cultures which valued life and nature. Agarwal argues: “Undeniably, the colonial experience and the forms that modern development has taken in Third World countries have been destructive and distorting economically, institutionally and culturally. However it cannot be ignored that this process impinges on preexisting bases of economic and social... inequalities (125).



Agarwal contends that blaming Western developmental plans for all the problems in South-Asia is ignoring the other half of the problem—“real local forces of power, and property relations that predate colonialism” (126). So, in order to combat the problems caused by the interaction of the colonial and precolonial structures of dominance that caused environmental degradation, Agarwal proposes an “alternative framework” that she calls “feminist environmentalism” (126). By this framework Agarwal tries to focus on two aspects: women’s and men’s relationship with their environment is determined by their material reality. Gender and class based division of labor will affect environment differently and will receive different responses. And the experiential knowledge about the natural environment is also tied to division of labor, property and power.

Closely related to Agarwal’s ‘feminist environmentalism’ is ‘environmental feminism’ or ‘critical ecological feminism’ proposed by Val Plumwood. The difference in nomenclature reflects the difference of emphasis, in one case on feminism and in the other environment. There is another difference too. Agarwal challenges ecofeminism and finds it incompatible with feminism. Plumwood on the other hand considers her ‘environmental feminism’ or ‘critical ecological feminism’ to be “strongly based in feminist theory” (*Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* 1). As already mentioned some of Agarwal’s objections against ecofeminism are valid considering the material conditions of the women of the Third World, however, the ‘environmental feminism’ that already claims to be rooted in feminism has room to accommodate the apparently contradictory traits that ecofeminism is criticized for. A postcolonial ecofeminism then may incorporate Agarwal’s concerns without rejecting ecofeminism as irrelevant altogether. Using her critiques as one starting point, a postcolonial ecofeminism addresses those critiques. In the discussion of the role of South-Asian authors in

developing postcolonial ecofeminism below, I show how their representative texts highlight the inadequacy of Western ecofeminism while still showing a room for a revised ecofeminism.

### **Anita Desai**

One author whose work contributes to postcolonial ecofeminism is Anita Desai. Desai, also known as Anita Mazumdar, born in India in 1937 to a German mother and Indian father, is one of the finest Indian authors writing in English. There are fifteen works of fiction to her credit and perhaps the most prominent theme in most of her works is existentialism. Bidulata Choudhry in her *Women and Society in the Novels of Anita Desai* states: “She [Desai]...is preoccupied with the agony of human existence. Each of her novels is an incessant search of human personality, found in the crisscross of changing values, and time” (37). Binod Mishra in his *Critical Responses to Feminism* also shares similar idea more elaborately:

Anita Desai...is more interested in the interior landscape of the mind than in politics or sociopolitical realities. Desai’s protagonists are women, who have reached different stages of life; even then they are fragile introverts, ‘trapped in their own skin’. Their emotional traumas sometimes lead to a violent death. Besides, the central theme of her novels is existential predicament of woman as an individual. (65-66)

There are many other Indian researchers too, like Nagappan Sethuraman and Poonam Rani Gupta who have studied Desai’s works from existentialist perspective. Since most of Desai’s protagonists are female, she is also regarded as a feminist. She however has been hesitant in accepting the label (See Bliss and Desai). Nonetheless, Desai’s works have provided rich feminist studies. Surprisingly, no substantial work is found on the ecocritical and ecofeminist strains in Desai’s work. Her *The Village by the Sea*, among some others, provides great insights into how Desai sees nature and portrays human-nature, especially women-nature relationship.

Desai's novels, especially her environmental novels that give special treatment to the natural environment, are ambivalent about women-nature relationship, when seen from mainstream ecofeminist perspective, like other authors' texts that I will discuss later in this chapter; the main reason being authors' depiction of characters' inherent contradictions and ambivalence, especially female characters, regarding their relationship with nature. Desai, including other authors to be discussed later, is not a proclaimed (or a self-proclaimed) ecofeminist. Through the realistic depiction of her characters and settings, and the contradictions and ambivalence in the characters, readers can find streaks of postcolonial ecofeminism.

Desai does not treat women as a univocal category, which is one celebrated aspect of ecofeminism that provides room for postcolonial ecofeminism. All ecofeminists agree that not only women and nature are connected in a patriarchal society, all those that the 'white elite male' wants to inferiorize are also related to women and nature. Rosemary Radford Ruether views women as a "gender group within every class and race" that shares the "privileges and disprivileges" of their own class and race, while also being oppressed by their men (*Ecofeminism and Globalization* vii-viii). So women of the lower class are oppressed by the men and women of the upper class and likewise men of the lower class are oppressed by the men and women of the upper class. Karen Warren also sees connections between "how one treats women, people of color, and the underclass on one hand and how one treats the nonhuman natural environment on the other" (*Ecofeminism* xi). Ellen O'Loughlin also adds "heterosexism" and "ageism", as related to "naturism" (148). For a postcolonial ecofeminism, it is important to highlight that both underclass men and women of the Third World are feminized and naturalized most immediately by the oppressors from within the internal colonies. Desai in her *The Village by the Sea* portrays industrialization of the remote village of Thul as a threat to the traditional

way of life of the inhabitants, both men and women. The villagers who live by the sea and some agricultural land are gradually deprived of both sources of food. First, big boats leave no fish to be caught with nets on the banks, and later the chemicals from the factory poison all the fish, and the agricultural land was forcibly taken for the fertilizer factory. Villagers cannot even find work in the factory since they are not trained to work with machines. Adarkar, the environmentalists from the nearby city Alibagh explains the situation to the villagers:

The factories will be run by trained engineers... They will take at least two thousand five hundred acres from us of our best land, the richest land in Maharashtra. In return they will cut down our tall coconut trees, destroy our paddy crops, kill the fish in the sea and then we will be driven away because we will be no use to them. (62-63)

This development in the form of factory then is clearly what Shiva would call 'maldevelopment'. However, Desai does not portray only women as victims of 'maldevelopment'. All the villagers including men, women and children who did have some occupation before the encroachment of industrialization in the form of the factory are now the victims since none of them is considered suitable to work in the fertilizer factory. Villagers and the people from the countryside have an instrumental value. Their importance as workers is denied when newer and faster means of production have been achieved. Even as workers they are the 'background' for what is more important is the product. When crops grown by these villagers and fish caught by them are sold in the cities, nobody cares how and by whom is this all produced and later when these manual workers will be replaced by skilled factory workers nobody will care for it will only be the background which will change. Desai is acutely aware of this rural-urban divide besides her insight on the hierarchical power structures within each community. Desai's work not only highlights dualisms like man/woman, rich/poor, urban/rural, culture/nature etc. where the former

denies the dependence on the latter, it also shows how the internal hierarchical structures are developed as strategies to cope with the economic crises resulting from 'maldevelopment'.

Desai clearly depicts that villagers' concern for the depletion of fish in the sea and the fertilizer factory as a threat to the traditional way of life is based on their material conditions. Villagers living close to nature are also dependent on nature for the same reason. In the case of the residents of Thul, they are all fishers and agriculturalists. The sea not only grants them food but also provides a source of income for the fish they catch is sold inside Thul and also exported to the big cities. Their land produces rice and coconuts not only for them to eat but also to be sold in the big market. Villagers, for this reason have a strong bond with the sea and the land. People in the big cities too are dependent on nature for food since all the seafood and the crops they consume are received from nature but the difference of both the rural and urban people is that of their attitude toward nature. Villagers respond to nature as stewards. They take benefit from nature but also take care of it. Women of Thul worship "the sacred rock" (*TRBS 7*) in the sea because they know that it nurtures them. People in the cities, on the contrary have an anthropocentric approach toward nature. They acknowledge nature for its instrumental value only. Fish and rice from Thul are welcome no matter how they are produced. Likewise the fertilizer factory, which is being built not only on the cost of economic security of the villagers but also on the cost of fresh air, sea-food and large rice fields, is welcome for the product of this factory will enhance the yield somewhere else if not in Thul. There are a small number of people in the cities too who are aware of the hazards of the factory. They are human-centered environmentalists who realize that the fertilizer factory is a threat to the city of Bombay too. The pollutants from the factory will pollute the air and poison the fish in the sea, which will eventually harm the people in the city too. Desai's critique of the human-centered

environmentalists reflects her concern for the life in general that is the foundational tenant of ecofeminism. Her depiction of characters from the rural and urban settings help build a postcolonial ecofeminist stance that explains human relationship with nature based on their material conditions.

By showing the difference of attitude of people from the village and the city toward nature, Desai highlights that the more one is closely dependent on nature, the more one is caring toward it. In the village, those who can afford to buy big engine boats are not as concerned with the overuse of a natural resource as those who catch fish with mere nets. Overuse of a natural resource like fish will affect the poor fishers, who have mere nets to fish with, more immediately. This category of fisher, men and women, will consequently feel the depletion of the resource more acutely than those who have larger means to catch fish. At the same time, Desai also presents that the villagers are treated as a resource for their instrumental value. The dependence on them is always denied. Even the human-centered environmentalists join hands with the villagers only to make sure that the environment in the city and the sea food that they eat is not poisoned by the fertilizer factory in the village. They want the villagers to continue with their traditional way of living so that the environment in the cities will not be polluted and the villagers will not swarm into the cities to find jobs. Sayyid Ali, the bird watcher and the environmentalist from Bombay speaks to the villagers:

All the citizens of Bombay are concerned. These factories that are to come up in Thul-Vaishet will pump deadly chemicals into the air ...Bombay is heavily industrialized, crowded and polluted...If you are forced to give up farming and fishing, you will have to leave your village and come to Bombay to find work...do you think there can be enough jobs here? Do you think there will be enough jobs here, or houses? (77-8)

The care and concern for the natural environment is not necessarily coming from an inherent sense of compassion for nature, it has other motives: economic, health related, and related to urban safety. This presentation is significant from a postcolonial ecofeminist perspective. Desai shows a variety of characters from both rural and urban setting and all have a varying degree of care or lack thereof for natural environment. The ambivalent human-nature relationships at times are resulting from a patriarchal/imperial ideology where, for example, people from the cities treat natural resources and the producers of those resources alike, for their instrumental value. The ambivalence in human-nature relationship also results from the adverse material conditions that force individuals, especially in the village, to use means that harm the very environment that sustains them.

Many critics of ecofeminism claim that every society does not connect women with nature and women-nature connection is not the only cause of women's oppression. Val Plumwood acknowledges that nature/culture dualism and all the related sets of dualisms (like reason/emotion, mind/body, self/other, human/nature etc.) characterized on gender basis is not a universal cultural phenomenon, nor is it any pattern of universal thought. She however stresses that it is "specifically a *western* thought" (11). Plumwood also recognizes that women-nature connection is not the only cause of women's oppression since there are certain societies where women are not connected to nature but they are still in relatively powerless situation. In the west, because women are connected to nature and men to culture, it does explain much about women's oppression in the west. Vandana Shiva claims that it is Western patriarchal thinking that also corrupted the cultural values of the colonies like India. However, she asserts that the indigenous cultures in India always related women to nature and nature to women but since these cultures were not patriarchal, they never devalued both.

### Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai

Feminists and critics of ecofeminism criticize Shiva's claim but her claim can equally be countered from a postcolonial ecofeminist perspective. Malayalam novelist and short story writer Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai (1912-1999) from Thakazhi India in his novel *Chemmeen* presents a society that still worships goddesses and is away from any technological 'maldevelopment'. For Shiva then, this should be an ideal society based on 'feminine principle'. Pillai however presents a different picture. In his internationally acclaimed Malayalam novel *Chemmeen*, he presents a community of fishers who live by the sea away from any technological and industrial encroachment. Although the story is set in post-independence India, Kerala on the southwest coast, in early 1950s, there are no evident references to whether or not the characters in the story are affected by colonization<sup>6</sup>. Living in extreme poverty, Pillai's characters are ruled and governed by tradition. The community's internal hierarchies based on caste system are the major cause of oppression of the lower castes. The strict caste system also provides a logic of domination to the upper caste/class since adhering to the system allows the rich to maintain their richness while the poor can never escape their low status. This caste/class hierarchy is further maintained by myth and religion where breaking the caste/class boundary results in enraging the goddess of the sea. For these characters, gender is both unaffected by Western patriarchal structures and still salient to the lives of the people in the village (see Agarwal).

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<sup>6</sup> Although, the society that the text represents is a post-independence society that might not necessarily be untouched by colonization, there are no evident references to colonization or colonial experience. Aijaz Ahmad in his "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'" refers to those texts written in local languages, (just as originally *Chemmeen* is written in Malayalam) that do not necessarily deal with the theme of nationalism as a result of colonial experience. Ahmad's argument is based on the critique of Jameson's idea of the "Third World literature". For Ahmad, any literature produced in the (post)colonial countries cannot always be read as a "National Allegory" as colonization is not the only experience that these people have.



Pillai's life-like characters have a desire to improve their life standards and fulfill their dreams. These desires and dreams are put in check by not allowing the low caste men to strive for a better future financially, and by restricting women to pursue their dreams. Religion, myth, and tradition are used as tools to keep poor men and women subdued. Men and women of the sea-goddess worshipping community have ambivalent relationship with their goddess who regulates their lives. According to the myth, the goddess becomes enraged when the traditions of the community that are maintained "for hundreds and hundreds of years" (9) are broken—for instance, when a poor fisher buys a boat without the consent of the elite of the community, and when women become disloyal to their men to cause the "currents in the sea... swallow them [the men] up" (8). There are clearly certain groups then who can benefit from letting the myth survive—the elite of the community in one case and men of the community in the other case. In this regard, people's relationship with their goddess that represents nature is based on cultural values that support patriarchy and class barriers. Those who challenge these values, as the central characters of the novel do, are in clash with the goddess representing the forces of nature. Pillai's depiction of a goddess-worshipping community that connects women with nature and nature with women is apparently an ideal society for Shiva and other spiritual ecofeminists who believe that such societies neither devalue women, nor do they devalue nature. Pillai shows that both the myth and tradition, one way or the other, oppress women. It helps strengthen postcolonial ecofeminism that stresses that environments are political and humans' relationship with their environment is based on their material conditions. In the given society, the elite are more concerned for the sea-goddess as the tradition and myth around the sea-goddess benefits them, more than any real concern for the environment itself. It helps them subdue the lower class and women at the same time. The poor fishers, who are more closely in contact with nature are

forced to use tactics that in turn challenge the tradition and harm their environment. Pillai also depicts characters besides those characters who are fighting to cross the class barriers or gender bias. These are the characters who are content with the way life is. One major character in this category is a poor fisher Palani, to whom the female protagonist Karuthamma is forcibly married. He is the only character who has a unique relationship with his environment. He is the one who values life for its own sake and believes that a fisher “cannot save money at the cost of innocent lives” (131). He refuses to buy his own boat that will help him catch more fish on the basis that he does not want to kill more fish just to have more.

Pillai’s Marxist tendencies are quite evident in almost all of his works, including *Chemmeen*. Indian leftist historian K.N. Panikkar in his “Literature as History of Social Change” states:

Influenced by Marxism, his early works were strongly ideological, and focused mostly on the problems of class values and class struggles. In this he was a pioneer, particularly on the subject of the making of the working class, the formation of its class-consciousness and the internalisation of class values. (10)

This observation is true for *Chemmeen* as well but *Chemmeen* being a love story based more on the female protagonist’s deeds and desires also brings the issue of women’s sexuality and ties it to the idea of women being an oppressed group in every class. Most ecofeminists like Plumwood criticize Marxism that considers one form of domination as central and others as subsidiary where fighting the central will eliminate the other types by default. Plumwood argues that “complex cultural identity of the master formed in the context of class, race species and gender domination” is important to identify as there is no “pure and simple” masculine identity (5). For Plumwood, culturally rooted structures of oppression perpetrate domination at every level. In

*Chemmeen* too the cultural values that are based on religion and myth help in persistence of domination at every level that not only strengthen class barriers, but also maintain gender inequality.

Pillai's depiction of ambivalent relationship of various characters with their natural environment reflects his understanding that these relationships are outcome of characters' material conditions. Those who bring the wrath of the goddess of the sea are either economically forced to challenge the myth and tradition or forced to rise against the oppression based on gender. Women are also symbolically and spiritually connected to nature in Pillai's depicted society. Their material conditions depict them as powerless and continuously in the state of struggle; their spiritual connection with nature shows their extreme power. The presented society, as already mentioned is goddess worshipping and considers women to be the daughters of the sea, just as it considers men as sons of the sea. Because of women's shared femaleness/femininity with the sea goddess, spiritually they are more powerful than men. Men's lives and the community's well-being is in their hands as their one misstep can destroy the entire community. Women-nature connection and the oppression of both at the hands of men don't escape Pillai. Men, referred to as the sons of the sea, have a typical patriarchal relationship with the sea and the goddess as men have toward women. They depend on the sea and women yet they deny their dependence on both. Although Pillai's presented society is not an ideal society for spiritual ecofeminists who would want women to have power, he does present women-nature connection in more than one ways that show postcolonial ecofeminist streaks in his works. Besides spiritual women-nature connection, Pillai's also shows women-nature connection that sanctions their twin oppression at the hands of patriarchy. Men in the presented society take help from their women in their day-to-day activities but women's activities are just 'background' to

men's major tasks. They never acknowledge the support they receive from women, just as some men use the natural resources from the sea without caring for the sea life. Both women's services and natural resources are used as commodities that are exploited to the fullest by the men.

### **Anuradha Roy**

In contrast to Pillai's tradition governed, goddess-worshipping community, Anuradha Roy, an Indian novelist and journalist presents in her *The Folded Earth* a modern community that neither is governed by myth and tradition, nor does it worship goddesses. Narrated in the first person by the young widowed female character Maya, the novel portrays Maya's attempt to escape from her past in a remote Himalayan village called Ranikhet. Although she fails at forgetting her past but her stay at Ranikhet among the hills and trees is a refuge. However, she witnesses her sanctuary endangered by the new administration that wants to turn the place into a resort—"a park...a resource...a factory" (175).

Human-nature connection is a dominant theme in Roy's works. In *The Folded Earth* she presents two types of characters, those who understand this connection and those who do not. She does not distinguish between the male and female regarding this connection. She also does not necessarily connect those humans to nature who are already living amid natural environment. This approach dismantles man/woman and rural/urban binary that connects nature to women and the villagers and separates them from men. It also supports the claim of those ecofeminists who consider men to be equally capable of having a caring relationship with nature. Roy presents urban characters like the narrator and her husband, who feel more attracted toward natural places. Maya's husband Michael loves the mountains so much that she states: "My rival in love was not a woman but a mountain range" (6) and that "his need for mountains was as powerful as his need for me" (7). Her husband loses his life while trekking in the Himalayas and she too

leaves the city and goes to live in Ranikhet. Maya believes that there is a hard-wired connection between humans and nature:

Michael's yearning made me understand how it is that some people have the mountains in them and some have the sea. The ocean exerts an inexorable pull over sea people wherever they are—in a bright lit inland city or the dead center of a desert—and when they feel the tug, there is no choice but somehow to reach it and stand at its immense, earth dissolving edge, straightaway calmed. Hill people, even if they are born in flatlands cannot be parted for long from the mountains. Anywhere else is exile. Anywhere else, the ground is too flat, the air is too dense, the trees too broad-leaved for beauty, the color of the light is all wrong, the sounds nothing but noise. (6-7)

By making her narrator reflect on the human-nature connection, Roy seems to assert that the connection exists but by characterizing her characters in two different categories she highlights two facts: Those who do not recognize their connection with nature indulge in activities that harm their natural environment. Secondly, there are those characters who do recognize their connection with nature and have a different relationship with it as compared to those who do not, and it is in this category that some characters show ambivalence regarding their relationship with nature based on their material reality. Roy's mentally underdeveloped character Puran is the extreme example of human-nature connection. For him, there is no boundary between the human and the non-human world. "He could talk to animals, but people left him confused and mumbling. He gave dead birds and bats tender burials and allowed monkeys to pick lice off his head" (57-8). Another young girl Charu, Puran's niece and Maya's friend finds solace with her cow named Gouri more than any human: "Gouri had come as a large-eyed, timid, sweet-faced calf when Charu was a girl and whenever she was troubled or scolded by her grandmother she

still ran to Gouri and buried her face in the cow's warm flanks" (34). Maya herself finds peace in nature: "I would retreat to a corner of our orchard, where under a chikoo tree a stray dog twice had puppies. I brought food for the bitch, milk for the puppies, letting the puppies nip my hands, feeling myself restored limb by limb, muscle by muscle, by their bemused joy over a dead leaf or a mound of soft earth they could dig" (63). Diwan Sahib, a major affluent and elderly male character understands "birdsong, tiger calls, barking deer" (44) more than he would understand and respond to a human. He also understands Puran's love for the animals: "Puran's affinity to animals was a lost treasure. Puran was the sanest of us all, because animal knew whom to trust. They were imbeciles themselves who called Puran half witted" (73). All these characters are those who understand their connection with nature and this realization in turn dismantles human/nonhuman boundary.

Roy also presents another category of characters—those who do not recognize their connection with nature, have different material realities, and have different motives and interests. Diwan Sahib's nephew Veer who climbs mountains, like Maya's husband but his relationship with the mountains and nature is different based on his inclinations and motives. Diwan Sahib can tell that Veer's interest in nature is different from his own and some other people's interest in nature: "He climbs the high Himalaya, the mountains give him his living. Yet with all the climbing and walking, what does he know of the forest or mountain, its wildlife or its plants? There is no sense of wonder in him. Lost. Gone, entirely. Its...*macho* thing for him: how high, how fast, how many peaks?" (70-1). When Maya tries to tell Diwan Sahib that Veer has an interest in nature and he has learned a lot from him, Diwan Sahib says: "No its different. His interest in nature—it's not what it seems. He is a complicated man" (72). Ranikhet, besides being the home of indigenous tribal people called adivasis is also a cantonment. The cantonment

administrator Mr. Chauhan also has a different type of interest in this naturally beautiful place. He wants Ranikhet “to have sights. It must generate revenue” and for that he makes sure that “swathes of oak forests [are] being cleared” for the new amusement park since just “peace and landscape” might not attract tourists as much (169). People like Veer and Mr. Chauhan want to appropriate the place, that reflects their imperialist plans, to get commercial benefits from it. Other characters, especially adivasis like Charu’s family do not commoditize the place, although they also depend on it for their sustenance.

Besides people like Puran, Charu, Maya, and Diwan Sahib, Roy presents people like Ama—Puran’s mother and Charu’s grandmother. She appears to be a strong matriarch of this extremely poor family. For a lack of a male head of the family, she has to fulfill the responsibilities of both the master and the mistress of the house. Her circumstances and responsibilities do not allow her to show as much affection and compassion for the animals as her son and granddaughter do. She is not incapable of the love, as there are instances when she understands Puran’s and Charu’s concerns for the animals, her material reality however reminds her of more important concerns: “That Puran...He’s senseless about his deer as about everything else. Lunatic fool giggles and whispers to it like it’s his lover, and feeds it all the grain I store for the hens. Between his deer and Charu’s useless dog, I am losing all the money I earn from selling milk” (117). Where Diwan Sahib considers the children of the local school to be fortunate for living in Ranikhet where they can “put their ears to the earth and rocks and hear them breathe” and “born rich who don’t understand what money is until it disappears” (165), Ama has different viewpoint, based on her experience and material reality: “Fortunate? Half of them don’t get enough to eat...they won’t even have a job when they finish with that school” and “I’d rather just have money and not the mountains...you can’t eat mountains” (165). Ama’s practical

approach, based on her experience, cannot be labelled as her lack of connection with nature. Compared to Diwan Sahib, Charu, Puran, and Maya, she has more pressing needs and concerns that determine her choices. Roy does not depict Ama's material conditions as affected by any imperial or developmental plans. Her material reality is the outcome of the lack of a responsible male member who would work for the livelihood of the family. It is her economic needs that determine her relationship with the environment.

Through Maya and Diwan Sahib, Roy critiques the developmental plans of the administration and the larger project of environmental imperialism. Diwan Sahib when visits the school to teach and entertain children with the birds and animal calls is unable to do so, instead he reflects:

But no animal comes to that spur now...there are trucks that come and go, the entrance to the spur is piled high with logs from trees that have been cut from the forest all around. Have you ever heard the sound of the tree being cut with saws—coming apart at the trunk and falling? ...They are building a log cabin at the spur—for the entertainment of the bureaucrats. They are building grand wooden gateways out of logs from these old trees. The trees with the eagles were cut down too. Nobody knows where the eagles went when their trees were felled. That is the forest now—it is a park, it is what is called a resource, a factory. It belongs neither to the people who owned it, nor to the animals and plants that lived in it. I thought I would tell you how fortunate you were, to live in this part of the world where you are surrounded by the rocks that breathe and animals that call to each other. You wanted me to call their calls for you—but I've forgotten their voices now. They have no voice any longer. (174-5)



Diwan Sahib's lamentation reflects his solastalgia<sup>7</sup> for the loss of the ecosphere he once reveled in. The so-called advancement of the place is depriving the aboriginal people as well as the animals of their original habitat. The developed new place is a resort that the rich urban people can come to visit and the adivasis, the natural landscape and the animals are a mere background of the resort.

Roy has a unique characterization style. She gives life and a personality to her non-human character too. Besides Charu's cow Gouri, there is Puran's small deer named Rani too "exquisite in its delicate beauty, its long eyelashes fencing in pools of brown" (69). Through these animal characters and their relationship with human characters, Roy dismantles the boundary between the human and non-human. It is important to note here that Roy erases the boundary between the human and the non-human where her human characters recognize their connection with nature. Those human characters who do not recognize their connection with nature also connect 'other' humans to the non-human. It is their attempt at othering all those that they consider inferior, hence establishing their own human model that is not only in contrast to the non-human but also excludes other humans. Roy clearly understands how connecting the poor and the underclass to nature/non-human gives a logic of domination to some; she still does not reject this connection as ideological. All her positive characters do have an affiliation with nature and all those who oppress human and the non-human are negative characters. So, like many ecofeminists, Roy's text shows that every male and female has a capacity to show care and compassion for nature; like a postcolonial ecofeminist she also stresses that human-nature

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<sup>7</sup> Coined by Philosopher Glenn Albrecht, the term solastalgia refers to distress or nostalgia caused by environmental change.

relationship is determined, on the one hand by patriarchal ideology that constructs nature as a commodity, and on the other hand, is also determined by the material conditions of humans.

Roy depicts reciprocal human-nature relationship where it is not only humans who are shown as loving and caring, or the opposite of it, toward the animals/natural environment. Where Charu feels devastated at the death of her cow, Puran's deer also dies when separated from him and sent to the zoo under the pretense of wildlife protection. Roy does not present Ranikhet only as a place full of natural beauty that serves as a background and a mere setting of the narrative. Ranikhet too is just like a character and there is a reciprocal relationship between the place and the humans. However it only opens up to those who own it and know it. When in winter, the tourists and summer visitors go back, Ranikhet dons its real face:

The tourists have gone and the summer visitors with them. Only now does our town feel truly ours, as if it has been rescued from intruders and returned to us... These are secrets hidden from those who escape the Himalaya when it is at its bleakest: the mountains do not reveal themselves to people who come here merely to escape the heat of the plains.

Through the summer, they veil themselves in a haze. The peaks emerge for those devoted to them through the coldest of winters, the wettest of monsoons. The mountains, Diwan Sahib said... believe that the love must be tested by adversity. (233)

Besides reflecting on the reciprocal human-nature relationship, Roy also seems to critique the tourist culture of such places. Inspired by the Western standards, places endowed with natural beauty are treated as resource that can generate revenue when turned into tourist resorts. The so-called development as a result then harms the natural environment along with the human and non-human residents. Roy provides few striking examples. Puran's deer is taken away from him claiming that he will kill the animal and eat it. Under the façade of wild life protection act the

deer is taken to the zoo where it dies of malnutrition. Similarly, on the one hand the administration allows some parts of the forest to be cleared to make parks, on the other hand, adivasis are persecuted for cutting the trees for heat and cooking food. So the acts like wildlife protection and forest conservation apparently maintain the ecosphere but in reality disrupt it by interfering in the traditional lifestyle of adivasis.

### **Amitav Ghosh**

Like Roy, Amitav Ghosh in his *The Hungry Tide* also brings to light similar concerns. Western ideals of wildlife protection and wilderness conservation cannot be blindly applied to the east. Where humans and the non-human are already living together in an ecosphere, before the developmental or conservation plans, protection of one from the other is more like an intrusion that is more harmful than beneficial. Set in the sea and plains of Bengal, *The Hungry Tide* unfolds the relationship between the humans and their environment by major female character Piyali's quest for rare Dolphins in Bengali waters and her friend and interpreter Kanai's reading of his uncle Nirmal's narrative. There are two narratives in the novel—one by the omniscient narrator who narrates most of the events, and the other by one of the characters Nirmal, a retired teacher and activist. Both the narratives build the plot together by interpreting the intertwined fates of humans and nature. The significant event in the novel that brings about the catastrophe is the uprising of the refugees who settled on one of the islands. The island is declared as a reservation for tigers, and refugees' settlement is considered as an encroachment. Ghosh highlights this human/nature divide that becomes the root cause of the destruction of both. Ghosh has a striking way of bringing home his point. By choosing Sundarbans as the setting of the novel, an area that is known for its tigers and crocodiles living alongside human population, Ghosh seems to assert that humans and animals have lived together for ages and they have their

own ways to survive. It is only the international pressure on Bengali tiger preservation on the local Indian government that forces the authorities to take measures that prioritize animal life over human life. Ghosh adds irony to the situation when Piya, a Bengali American cetologist comes to study the rare dolphins in the area. When Piya tells Kanai that she wants to study the marine mammals of Sundarbans, he is amazed and says: “I didn’t even know there were any such...all we hear about is the tigers and the crocodiles” (10). The irony in this situation rests in the fact that although tigers and dolphins both are found in Sundarbans but Kanai and many other locals only know and talk about tigers and not the dolphins, the reason being tiger conservation laws. The locals inhabit the environment along with the non-human residents but the external pressure on the authorities create an animosity between humans and animals where animal life is preferred over human life. When the villagers kill a tiger that had preyed on human lives, Piya gets upset but Kanai explains:

That tiger had killed two people...and that was just in one village. It happens every week that people are killed by tigers. How about the horror of that? If there were killings on that scale anywhere else on earth, it would be called a genocide, and yet here it goes unremarked...Isn’t that a horror too—that we can feel the suffering of an animal, but not of human beings...it was people like you [Piya]...who made a push to protect wildlife here without regard for the human costs. (248)

Through this instance, it appears that Ghosh considers human life as more precious than the non-human life. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin in their editorial introduction to the special issue of *Interventions*, “Green Postcolonialism” also contend that “people, Ghosh appears to argue, must necessarily take precedence over animals” (5). Ghosh’s views for most of the narrative appear to be Hegelian—‘let being be’. He seems to criticize human/nature dualism but at the

same time he reminds the reader of the animosity between human and nonhuman. While tracing the history of Bengal famine in 1942, he refers to the human deaths caused by crocodiles, tigers and snakes in humans' effort to collect honey, firewood and fruit from the jungle. Ghosh's stance is the most ambivalent when on the one hand he presents Piya concerned for a trapped dolphin and on the other hand burning of a tiger by the villagers in self defense. Ghosh is not against the wildlife protection laws, as he seems to advocate "sensible policy of no conservation laws without local consultation and participation" (Huggan and Tiffin 6).

Ghosh also renders some spiritual qualities to the human/nature relationship. People of the Sundarbans are portrayed as believers of the purity of heart in human nature encounter. If the hearts are not pure, the encounter with the sea especially can be disastrous. Likewise there is a goddess of the jungle Bon Bibi who guarantees the safety of humans in their encounter with tigers and other animals as she "rules over the jungle...the tigers, crocodiles and other animals do her bidding" (85).

Desai, Pillai, Roy, and Ghosh all present different societies, but one common thread in all these is their depiction of the natural environment. All of them have presented the natural environment as a character that reciprocates with the human characters that in turn builds the theme of human-nature relationship in the texts. However, all these authors depict this relationship in a different light as it depends on the material conditions of the characters being portrayed. All the human characters or even men and women separately cannot be grouped together as having a certain kind of relationship with their natural environment as each character's relationship is based on, and is determined by his/her material reality that is most of the time beyond their control. Hunger and catastrophe is one big reality that most of the characters live in. It is also evident that the authors have shown this hunger and catastrophe

resulting from some external and internal intruding forces and ideologies like development (as in case of *The village by the Sea* and *The Folded Earth*), preservation (as in the case of *The Hungry Tide*), and patriarchy (as in the case of *Chemmeen*). The developmental and preservation plans, and the patriarchal ideology in the given texts create environments for the characters that force them to make certain choices and take actions that most of the times are harmful for the environment and the ecosphere that perpetrates their own tragedy.

For mainstream ecofeminism, the only reason humans can harm their environment, as Plumwood would assert, is the internalized dualistic thinking that puts human before animal, culture before nature, reason before emotion, men before women and so on. This however is not the case always in the texts by South-Asian writers, especially those discussed in this chapter. More than any ideology that prefers culture to nature and human to animal, the characters in the given texts who are apparently living in close proximity with nature are employing survival strategies that result in disruption of the ecosphere. There are also examples where the characters are deeply concerned with the wellbeing of their ecosphere but those are only the cases where there is no external intrusion or pressure on the characters to act otherwise. All the discussed texts show humans who have a capacity to live in harmony with nature along with the non-human; the disjuncture between humans and non-human comes in the forms of intrusion in the form of development, preservation, and patriarchal ideology.

Where ecofeminism of the postcolonial societies challenges the mere ideological basis of the oppression of nature and those related to it—women, children, and the underclass—it does acknowledge the connection between women, children, underclass, and nature. The authors here not only present the ambivalent relationship of different characters toward their environment based on their material conditions, they are also acutely aware of women-nature connectedness

along with the feminized and naturalized status of the poor, weak, and the children. *In The Village by the Sea* the villagers and nature only have instrumental value for the urban people. In *Chemmeen* women/nature connection helps perpetuate patriarchal ideology, in *The Folded Earth*, those who recognize their connection with nature are oppressed just as nature is oppressed. In *The Hungry Tide*, the poor and nature have no specific value in themselves, but when it comes to international pressure and law making, animals assume more rights than humans.

### CHAPTER 3. WOMEN AND THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENTS

In this chapter I develop my claim that mainstream ecofeminism is inadequate to translate the experiences of the women of the Third World. This chapter specifically focuses on the ecofeminist assumption of women's relationship of care and compassion with nature as a result of their close proximity with nature. Through textual examples, I show the complexity of relationships between Third World women, specifically South-Asian women, and their natural environment, because those relations are based on their material conditions and social status rather than necessarily that of care and compassion. I first analyze the texts – *Chemmeen* by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya, and *The Village by the Sea* by Anita Desai – to highlight the practices of the characters, male and female, which appear to be disruptive and harmful for their natural environment that sustains them. Then I use alternative analysis that I term as postcolonial ecofeminist perspective, to interpret the practices of the characters in a different way, while considering the livelihood strategies of these characters.

Women's closeness to nature as a result of their socialization as nurturers and caretakers does not empower them, as this closeness and association is used to inferiorize both women and nature. Judith Plant in her *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism* asserts: "It is true that women have been socialized in such a way that allows them to experience compassion" (3); this quality does not afford them any power since their care and compassion for others, because of their inferior status as female, "becomes entangled with personal frustrations over feelings of powerlessness, leading to an ability to take responsibility" (3). Plant stresses the need for women to claim those attributes resulting from socialization that are beneficial for the species. She encourages women to overcome the internalized patriarchal values that reinforce women's own



inferiority. Only then women will be able to take their own responsibility and make men to take theirs.

When this scenario is seen against the experiences of the women of the Third World, it is evident that these women are also socialized in a way that puts them in positions of caretakers and nurturers. Vandana Shiva, an Indian physicist, environmental activist and anti-globalization author claims that women in the Third World have a stronger connection with nature where the oppression of nature is directly linked to the oppression and marginalization of women. She believes that women “produce and reproduce life not merely biologically, but also through their social role in providing sustenance” (*Staying Alive*, 41). Shiva calls for recovering a feminine principal that is based on inclusiveness:

It is a recovery in nature, woman and man of creative forms of being and perceiving. In nature it implies seeing nature as a live organism. In woman it implies seeing women as productive and active. Finally, in men the recovery of the feminine principle implies a relocation of action and activity to create life-enhancing, not life-reducing and life-threatening societies. (51)

Shiva believes that the reason for the death of feminine principle in women is passivity seen as feminine and in men by change in the concept of activity “from creation to destruction, and the concept of power from empowerment to domination” (51). The recovery of feminine principle that is “selfgenerated, non-violent, creative activity” (51) then ensures the collective liberation of nature, women and even men, who in their act of dominating women and nature “have sacrificed their own human-ness” (51).

Plant and Shiva both assert that women are socially positioned in roles that allow them to embrace nature as part of their lives; both agree that women have a sense of care and compassion

for all forms of life, as Plant would assert, and that they embody feminine principle, as Shiva would assert; both consider patriarchal ideology to be the cause of women's inactivity to take responsibility toward all forms of life. However, the texts that I analyze in this chapter contest the notion of the attributes of care and compassion, and the feminine principle on the part of women. It is contestable, not on the basis of what Plant and Shiva consider—internalized patriarchal values—, but because of their material conditions. By material conditions I mean the conditions in which they live and work. Although I analyze certain South-Asian texts, my analysis and findings can be appropriated to suite other cultures and societies of the global South because of its colonized/imperialized status.

As I mentioned above, Plant and Shiva believe that women universally have compassion for life in general but because they have internalized patriarchal values that devalue everything that is related to women; they do not acknowledge their own positive attributes like care and compassion because they see it as entrapment. I argue that in the fishing and agrarian societies in South-Asia, India, women's attitude toward their natural environment is not necessarily that of care and compassion based on feminine principle and the reason is their material conditions created by either their status as post/colonized, and/or by the internal patriarchal and hierarchical structures. Their practices and behaviors, that at times are harmful for their environment, are determined by their material reality. There is a fine line between being forced by patriarchy, and by being forced (and/or being left with not other choice) by the material conditions. This subtle distinction reflects the same difference between ecofeminism and postcolonial ecofeminism. Ecofeminism acknowledges that women are inferior in every society and that they are conditioned to work under patriarchal values. Once they challenge the patriarchal values, they can bring about the desired change. Postcolonial ecofeminism on the other hand not only

acknowledges the inferior status of women and their patriarchal conditioning but also the status of both men and women as post/colonized in the Third World downtrodden societies. As a result the practices of women and even men most of the time are determined by the environments in which they work.

In the postcolonial societies, besides the internal hierarchies maintained by patriarchy, there are other hierarchies too. It is embedded in our dualistic thinking, as Val Plumwood would contend, that we prioritize reason over emotion, mind over body, culture over nature and so on. As a result, reason, mind and culture are superior and related to man. Emotion, body and nature on the other hand are inferior, hence related to women. So conceptually, in a patriarchal society, everything that is considered superior is male and everything that is considered inferior is female. For post/colonial societies, this conceptualization is more complex. A post/colonized society in its entirety, including male and female human and the non-human, is inferiorized, feminized, and naturalized by the colonial/imperial power. When the human and the non-human animals and nature are controlled by the colonial/imperial powers, the resulting ecosphere becomes political. The political nature of the ecosphere then determines the relationship between the human and the non-human, between men and nature, and between women and nature.

In the following sections, I analyze *Chemmeen* by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya, and *The Village by the Sea* by Anita Desai to show that women in these societies have ambivalent relationships with their environment. This ambivalence is the result of their material conditions brought about by the internal as well as colonial/imperial hierarchical structures. *Chemmeen* and *The Village by the Sea* portray the lives and plight of fishing communities in India whereas *Nectar in a Sieve* portrays an agrarian Indian community.

## Chemmeen

*Chemmeen* by Pillai is set in “the tiny fishing villages of Kerala on the southwest coast” (Rau, no pag.), among Hindu fishers in the early 1950s before the area was struck by postcolonial policies for “mechanization and modernization of fishing” began (Pokrant et.al. 125). Although, these fishers lived on the social and geographical margins of Indian society, they were free to fish in the sea, unlike the inland Bengali fishers; their access to sea was not restricted by the leasing arrangements. The only restrictions were their own poverty to access boats and nets, and caste-based traditions as to who was eligible to buy boats (125).

C. Paul Verghese in his “Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai—An Assessment” written in 1970 proclaimed *Chemmeen* to be the best of Pillai’s works. For Verghese, the reason for *Chemmeen*’s success in the outer world is its appeal to “the inner landscape” of humans: “*Chemmeen* deals with essential emotions and with effect upon individuals of the breaking of traditions, customs and taboos” (121). It is an ordinary story, says Verghese, but what makes it magical is Pillai’s treatment of the story by giving it an aura of fable. The realistic depiction of the economic plight of the fishers blended with the traditional myths makes the story unique.

*Chemmeen* is also unique for its environmental concern. It fits the category of ‘environmental texts’<sup>8</sup>, like other texts discussed later in the chapter, that present environment not merely as a background but a character. *Chemmeen* presents a community of fishers who are

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<sup>8</sup> Lawrence Buell in his *The Environmental Imagination* enumerates and explains the characteristics of an “Environmental Text” as follows: “1: The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history. 2: The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest. 3: Human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation. 4: Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text” (7–8).

divided on the basis of caste—“Arayan, Valakkaran, Mukkuvan, Marakkan—as well as a lower fifth caste” (Pillai 30). On one level *Chemmeen* is a love story of a fisher girl Karuthamma and a Muslim boy Pareekutti who is a trader. On a deeper level however, the story is also that of the sea and the way it regulates, by means of customs, traditions and myths, the lives of those who live by it.

The women-nature connection becomes a prominent theme of the novel. In the fictionalized community that Pillai portrays women have important roles to play—they are “daughters of the sea” (8), just as men are “sons of the sea” (162). Women play out their roles on two levels. One is symbolic and spiritual where they are regarded as guardians of their men on the sea. When a woman is married, it is not she who is being “entrusted” to the man but the contrary: “a man [is] entrusted to a woman” (93) because “the lives of the men at sea are in the hands of the women on shore” (8) who pray for the safety of their men. Chastity of women plays a huge role in the novel (Hart 243). In this regard, the survival of a fisherman depends on “the purity of his wife” (*Chemmeen* 9). If the woman is not pure and has been “defiled”, that brings the “anger of the goddess of the sea” when “she would destroy everything” (9). Woman in such a role holds extreme power, as she can be a maker or a destroyer of not only her husband’s but also the entire community’s life. Her “power-from-within,” that she holds because of her relationship with the goddess of the sea, “is connected to the actual material conditions of life, for the material world is the territory of the spirit” (Starhawk 176). Overcome by her extreme love for Pareekutti, Karuthamma forgets her responsibility of the “guardian of the tradition” (*Chemmeen*, 95); she neglects to pray for her husband as a pure woman and thus allows her husband be the victim of the wrath of the goddess of the sea. By breaking away from the traditions of the

community of fishers, apparently, Karuthamma contributes in destroying lives, including her own and many others around her—her mother, father, husband, sister, daughter and Pareekutti.

Besides their spiritual roles, women also have to play actual social roles in *Chemmeen* where they have to work along with their husbands for the sustenance of their families. These roles also vary according to their caste and status in the community. Chakki, Karuthamma's mother, besides playing her spiritual role of the "guardian angel" (220) of her husband, works as the household manager. She also financially supports the family by selling the fish, "going east to the market," like many other women of the community (16). She supports her husband in all the decisions that he makes, even those that go against the tradition of the community, buying a boat being one such example. According to the tradition, Chakki and her husband are not entitled to buy a boat because of their caste (30), she however not only approves of him buying a boat but also contrives means to get the money for the boat, be it borrowing "six or seven bundles of dried fish" from Pareekutti (15), or "danc[ing] round [Pareekutti] and run[ning] after him" for money (21). Karuthamma declares that her "father and mother had conspired to do a hideous act to make the sea go barren" (20). Chemban Kunju's (Chakki's husband) act of buying a boat is not only a threat to the traditions of the community but also disrupts general cycle of the sustenance that the community has. Besides, by forcing Karuthamma to marry a man she does not love, Chemban also becomes responsible for Karuthamma's, Pareekutti's, and Palani's destruction. So, spiritually, Karuthamma maybe responsible, but materially, it was Chemban Kunju who caused more destruction by imposing his and society's patriarchal views on Karuthamma. He also disrupts society's traditions by buying a boat. The increase in the number of boats and nets would also mean more killing of "innocent lives" (132). When Chemban Kunju considers a second haul of the day, his friend opines: "you can't empty the sea just because you

are making money” (71). Hence, all those who are involved in activities that are disruptive of the traditions and the sustainable life of the community are harming their environment in one way or the other. Karuthamma in her spiritual role contributes in oppression of the environment and the people around her. Her disloyalty to her husband brings the wrath of the goddess of the sea and destroys lives. Chakki too, while providing full support to her husband in most of his actions does not show any special concern for the tradition that would guarantee the well being of the community and the environment. She supports him to disrupt the tradition of the community that supposedly guarantees equilibrium in the social life and is also important for a sustainable sea-life as every fisher owning a boat would cause depletion of life in the sea that sustains the community. She also becomes Chemban’s accomplice in financially ruining Pareekutti.

In *Chemmeen*, there is no clear-cut dichotomy between men and women regarding their relationship with the natural environment they inhabit. Both have ambivalent relationships with nature. However, the only person showing true compassion for the environment is a male character Palani. When Karuthamma, his wife advises him to save money and buy a boat and a net of his own, he explains:

If all the fishermen on this seacoast thought like that, the whole seacoast would be full of millionaires. Why is it that everybody doesn’t think like that?... A fisherman cannot save. This is because he makes his money at the cost of millions of lives. He makes his money by cheating and catching innocent beings moving freely in the sea. To look upon those millions dying with their eyes open was nothing to those who saw that sight everyday. But you cannot save money at the cost of innocent lives. It was not possible. Otherwise why should fishermen starve? (131-2)

Palani does not present this idea to his wife as a secret that only he knows. He presents it as a fact that every fisherman knows. It is just that he acts upon what he thinks is right while others like Chemban, in an attempt to raise their life standard and challenge the unjust social structures put their interests and desires above any other, human and the non-human. Palani is a carefree fisher who does not have to face the harsh realities that Chemban and his family have to face. First Palani only has himself to care for and then during his short married life, it is only his wife who is his responsibility, unlike Chemban who has his daughters too to take care of. So, Palani's and Chemban's relationship with their environment is also determined by their material conditions.

The text also questions the claims of spiritual ecofeminists like Starhawk and Shiva who believe that not only women are spiritually 'close to nature' but also that the societies that worship goddesses neither devalue women, nor do they devalue nature. Starhawk in her "Feminist Earth Based Spirituality and Ecofeminism" claims, "in the world view of earth religion, we are nature and our human capacities of loyalty and love, rage and humor, lust, intuition, intellect and compassion are as much a part of nature as the lizards, as the redwood forests" (178). Women's symbolic connection with nature is evident in the text, as in their spiritual roles, they are daughters of the sea, but this connection does not necessarily lead to an ethic of care and compassion toward nature. In order to fulfill their personal desires, both Chakki and Karuthamma cause the disruption of the environment. Seen from a postcolonial ecofeminist perspective, these ambivalent attitudes of both men and women can be explained. When Chakki helps her husband to find means to buy a boat while going against the traditions of the community, she in fact rebels against the unjust power structures of the society where the poor is doomed to be poor and oppressed by the powerful of the society. Help that she seeks from the trader Pareekutti is also an attempt to raise the family's social and financial status. Similarly,



Karuthamma becomes the cause of disruption in an attempt to show compassion to a person—Pareekutti—who was ruined because of her parents' greed, that according to Karuthamma made "the sea go barren" (20).

### **The Village by the Sea**

*The Village by the Sea* by Anita Desai portrays another community of fishers and agriculturalists in a remote village of Thul, India. It is the story of two young adult siblings Hari and Lila and their family that comprises of their parents and two younger siblings Bela and Kamal. *The Village by the Sea* is set at the time when the small community of fishers that the novel portrays is struck by the encroachment of industrialization. Industrialization in the wake of advancement poses threat to the traditional ways of the lives of the villagers who live by the sea. As in *Chemmeen*, natural environment in *The Village by the Sea* becomes not merely a background but a character that plays its full part in the lives of the fishers.

Desai gives a special treatment to her female characters. Protagonists or not, female characters hold very significant and strong position in her texts. Most of her critics, for the same reason regard her as a feminist. Desai however rejected this claim in an interview: "When I started writing I think that I wasn't even aware of such a concept as feminism. And I don't have much patience with the theory that it's women who suffer. As far as I can see, men suffer equally"(Bliss and Desai 524). Desai's texts back up her assertion as it is not only the female characters in her works who suffer but male characters too. In the *Village by the Sea*, Hari, a young boy is the protagonist who feels pressured by the responsibility of a sick mother and two sisters, as his drunkard father shirks his responsibilities. Hari suffers at the hands of circumstances caused by industrialization in their small village just as women and all other characters do. Like her other novels, women in the fictional community of *Village by the Sea*

play significant role in providing sustenance to their respective families, according to their status in the hierarchical structure of the community. There are small boat-owning fishers; there are those who own engine boats like Biju, and then there are those who only have nets to fish with, like Hari. Women belonging to all these three different categories of social status have different relationship and attitude toward their environment. In the very beginning of the novel, the readers are introduced to this diversity. When Bela and Kamal go to the sea to “collect the molluscs” along with other girls and women, they are referred to as “gulls and curlews and reef herons that stalked the shallows, fishing together” (19). Collecting molluscs is “an occupation for women” (19) but that too of only those who are from the lowest strata of the society. There are also wives and daughters of boat-owning fishers who neither need to collect molluscs, nor are they part of the imagery of “gulls and curlews” (7).

Look there goes Hema with her mother,’ said Bela, pointing at two colorful figures at the beach—the mother dressed in a sari printed with bright flowers, purple and pink and orange, and the girl in a violet dress with a silver fringe. Many of the women stared at the dazzling clothes and sniggered. ‘They have been to Alibagh to buy fish.’ ‘Too fine to catch their own, eh?’ said another. ‘They don’t need to. You know Biju, when he comes back from his fishing trip, he has tons of fish in his boat...they don’t need to buy any fish.’ (19-20)

Women continue this conversation that brings home the point that those who can afford to buy bigger boats have better lives but then there is no fish left for the poor fishers to catch to even feed their families. Two types of women are introduced in the aforementioned scene. There are those who are rich, who don’t have to collect molluscs for dinner or buy fish from others. The other category is that of those who barely survive. The attitudes of both these types toward the

environment are different from each other. The ones with the “dazzling” clothes don’t care whether there is any fish left on the shore for those who don’t own boats and fish merely with nets. Those who belong to the lowest strata however are aware of this fact because they are directly affected by the depletion of the available resources. The way Biju, the wealthy boat owner is callous about the plight of the poor fishers, so are women of his family. Among the lower strata of the community, men as well as women are equally aware of the depletion of the fish in the sea. Thus their response to the natural environment is based more upon their post-colonial material conditions than upon gender.

Women in the village live in a natural environment where they see the men catching fish every day. Their concern for their livelihood from the fish as a resource may appear to be resulting from their living by the sea. However, women in the cities are also depicted showing their concern for a sustainable living. When Hari goes to the city, he is surprised to see women marching and protesting: “They held up banners, raised their fists in the air and shouted, ‘Bring down the prices! ‘We want oil! We want sugar! We want rice at fair prices’ and ‘Long live Women’s Society for Freedom and Justice’” (76). These women are also protesting for a sustainable life just as the women in the village. The difference however is in their approach. Those who directly suffer from the lack of resources are more aware of their environment. Women in the village are only concerned about the fish in the sea, or the agricultural land that the factory will snatch from them, women in the cities are concerned about the high prices of the edibles. The text carefully displays how each group communicates concerns that are natural outcomes of their circumstances and not because they have some internal concerns about the ecological well-being of the universe. Each group of women depicted in the text shows concern for a sustainable living but their concerns are also conditioned by their material conditions.

Comparatively rich village women like those in Biju's family are callous about the depletion of fish when large boats bring big hauls, however when their agricultural land is taken from them for the fertilizer factory that will eventually poison the fish in the sea too, they show the same concern that other poor villager men and women have.

Desai has also portrayed the elite strata of the society, of both men and women, for whom places like Thul are recreational resorts. De Silvas are neither worried about the depletion of fish in the sea, nor are they concerned about the high prices of oil and rice.

It was a sight to see them all playing and splashing in the sea, screaming and laughing as the waves tumbled them over... Thul villagers walking up and down the beach on their errands stopped to stare and laugh. The people of Thul went into the sea to launch their boats or catch fish, not to swim and splash like fish or frogs. They thought the visitors from Bombay definitely touched in the head. (36-37)

Women belonging to the different strata of society and from rural and urban setting, all have a varying degree of attitude toward their environment. The more they depend on the natural resources, more concerned they are for their natural environment. There is not necessarily a special difference in their attitudes as compared to men. For poor fishermen and women, depletion of fish in the sea would mean starvation; for de Silvas however, Thul is a resort where they can come to enjoy the natural environment during their vacations.

*The Village by the Sea* has obvious ecocritical/ecofeminist undertones. The text clearly depicts poor women, the underclass, and children more responsive toward nature as compared to men and the privileged. Besides poor women and men's concern about overfishing, children like Kamal, Hari and Lila's younger sister, is also depicted as caring for the non-human, especially a dog named Pinto in the text. Pinto the dog actually belonged to a man named Pinto who had

duped their father once and disappeared having taken fifty rupees from him. Kamal had found Pinto's dog and its puppies and had brought back home "the smallest and weakest of them" (24).

Of course no one could hold that against his dog or its puppies. Pinto was small and furry, grey and white, and brave as a lion. He loved Kamal who had rescued him, but he was most devoted of all to Lila who stayed at home all day with him and never deserted him. Only Hari never touched him and looked at him accusingly always. Every time he saw Pinto he was reminded of his father's foolishness. (24)

Kamal also gets distressed when she sees a little mongoose being hunt "with a dozen sticks, a pack of wild dogs and a band of howling men" (55). For her, drinking water from the coconuts was not so big a crime for which the men destroyed mongoose so ferociously.

The most dominant theme of the text however is the clash between the traditional ways of living and modernization. Vandana Shiva considers the Western developmental plans for the Third World as more harmful than beneficial as she sees these as continuation of colonization process that expands the wealth of the colonizer and produces more poverty for the colonized. She explains in her *Staying Alive*: "Development could not but entail destruction for women, nature and subjugate cultures, which is why, throughout the third world, women, peasants and tribals are struggling for liberation from development just as they earlier struggled for liberation from colonialism" (2). Technology and modernization create internal colonies where the rich oppresses the poor—men and women. In the fictional text those concerns show in wealthy 'engine boat' owners and the producers of the fertilizer factory who both are a threat for women and the poor fisher and peasants who are deprived of their only means of sustenance—catching fish with nets, collecting molluscs and rice and coconut from their fields. It is precisely for this reason that Shiva calls it "maldevelopment." Despite her first-hand knowledge about the plight

of women and the poor in India, Shiva is still criticized for considering all the women as a unified category who have “special empathetic and nurturing capacities in relation to nature” (Braidotti et.al. 2) that she would call a ‘feminine principle’.

*The Village by the Sea* creatively represents examples of this criticism of Shiva’s misunderstanding about differences between classes of women. *The Village by the Sea* portrays some women who are callous about the poverty and hunger of others, and it also portrays men who are concerned about the depletion of natural resources. Considering the overall circumstances of the people of the community, those who indulge in harmful practices that cause the depletion of natural resources are trying to raise their financial status to avoid plight like that of the poor fishers who cannot afford boats. For them it is a survival tactic that is necessary to improve living conditions. As a result “the drive for life and drive for destruction” become mutually interdependent (Solanki 17). Those, like Hari who are the lowest of the low in the hierarchy of the society have to eventually shun the traditional ways of living to go to the cities and find other means of sustenance as a survival strategy. Adaptation is one of the most prominent themes of Desai’s work. In order to survive, one has to adapt to the change. All of Desai’s characters, in one way or the other are trying to cope with the circumstances, that from mainstream ecofeminist perspective appear to be harmful for the environment and life in general.

### **Nectar in a Sieve**

The title of Kamala Markandaya’s novel *Nectar in a Sieve* is borrowed from the epigraph of S.T. Coleridge’s poem “Work Without Hope”: “Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve, /And hope without an object cannot live.” The “object” of hope according to the text is the land as the female protagonist Rukmani says: “while there was land, there was hope” (132). *Nectar in a Sieve* is the story of Rukmani, the female protagonist who fights against all odds to survive the

change that advancement and industrialization bring to her once self-contained and contented life in a small village in India. Published in 1954, the novel is still relevant as Donna Seaman in her “Another Look at: Kamala Markandaya’s First Novel, *Nectar In a Sieve*” observes:

What is most striking about reading *Nectar in a Sieve* now, beyond its exquisiteness, integrity, and compassion, is the sense of how little has changed. People are still forced off the land, environmental devastation worsens, world’s fast-multiplying poor suffer every deprivation and injustice, and women still bear the brunt of it. (32)

The story is narrated by the female protagonist Rukmani who is married when only twelve-years-old to a poor peasant for lack of dowry and accepts her fate for very practical reasons:

While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye and your husband sees beauty in you which no one has seen before, and you have a good store of grain laid away for hard times, a roof over you and a sweet stirring in your body, what more can a woman ask for? (8)

Rukmani is not only aware of the fact that the apparent “poor match” between herself and her husband is actually the “best” because she had neither “beauty” nor “dowry” to find a “rich husband” (4), she is also aware of her husband’s good fortune for having married “above him” and still be happy: “A man is indeed fortunate if he does not marry above him, for if he does, he gets a wife who is no help to him whatsoever, only an ornament. I know, for I was ignorant of the simplest things, and no ornaments either” (9-10). Rukmani helps and supports her husband in every possible way. When he works in the field as a tenant farmer, she plants a garden “in the flat patch of the ground behind the hut” (10). Rukmani’s garden is very significant in understanding her relationship with nature/environment. When she first plants the pumpkin seeds, her excitement and pride is not less than that of a farmer who harvests the fields.

The soil here was rich, never having yielded before and loose so that it did not require much digging. The seeds sprouted quickly, sending up delicate green shoots that I kept carefully watered, going several times to the well nearby for the purpose. Soon they were not delicate but sprawling vigorously over the earth, and pumpkins began to form, which, fattening on soil and sun and water, swelled daily, larger and larger and ripened to yellow and red, until at last they were ready to eat...I tried not to show my pride...pleasure was making my pulse beat, the blood unbidden, came hot and surging to my face...After that ten times more zealous, I planted beans and sweet potatoes, brinjals and chillies, and they all grew well under my hand, so that we ate even better than we had done before. (10)

The elaborate embodied imagery of land that Rukmani sketches positions her more as a steward than as a female who identifies herself with the land because of her shared experience of reproduction. Her embodied imagery does portray the land as a mother's womb but her treatment of the land is more like that of a male who impregnates the womb. According to Carolyn Sigler's ecocritical models, the stewardship model assumes that humans are caretakers of nature (148). Rukmani's emphasis on her role in the growth and development of the garden can be paralleled to that of her husband's role as a farmer. Both of them in their respective roles are planting the seeds and harvesting, hence tending to the land for its instrumental value. Rukmani's attitude toward nature as a steward is also manifest when she says: "Nature is like a wild animal that you have trained to work for you. So long as you are vigilant and walk warily with thought and care, so long will it give you its aid; but look away for an instant, be heedless or forgetful, and it has you by the throat" (*Nectar* 39).

Rukmani's pride and excitement at her ability to plant the land, and her desire to control the "wild animal" called "Nature" are far from the ecofeminist assumption that women have



special concern for nature where they consider themselves a part of it. Here is another striking example from the text where Rukmani is in conversation with Kenny:

‘I see you collect dung and take it with you. Is it not for the land?’ ‘Indeed no. Dung is too useful to be given to the land, for it is fuel to us and protection against damp and heat and even ants and mice. Did you not know?’ ‘Too well,’ he answered shortly. ‘I have seen your women forever making dung cakes and burning them and smearing their huts. Yet I thought you would know better, who live by the land yet think of taking from it without giving’ (32).

In this conversation, Rukmani’s statement: “Dung is too useful to be given to the land” cannot be ignored. This statement positions Rukmani in her relationship with the land. It is evident that for her, human needs are more important than the needs of the land. Where on the one hand she is tending to her garden like a proud farmer who views the plants as her investment, her refusing to use dung as a soil fertilizer is ironic. The circumstances she is put in explain her ambivalent relationship with the land. She has multiple needs and she has to prioritize her needs on the basis of urgency. She has to take care of human life first and then she can think about land that nurtures them. In her “Planting Seeds in Kamala Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve*” Beth Zeleny reads the text to look at the relationship of the author Markandaya and female protagonist Rukmani to the environment. Zeleny considers *Nectar in a Sieve* as a valuable example for feminist literary geographical criticism that studies “woman-centered and woman-authored fictional literary landscapes” (Zeleny 22). While establishing the theoretical grounds of her study of the text, Zeleny states:

Women-centered literature celebrates able, intelligent women as shapers of landscape: fictional female protagonists own and manage land. Rather than dominate or conquer

land, they enjoy a cooperative and harmonious relationship with environment. These women enjoy strong emotional bond with place termed topophilia [Tuan 1974], even during difficult, hazardous, or dangerous situations. (24)

Applying feminist literary geographical criticism on the text, Zeleny is able to see that Markandaya's and Rukmani's relationship with their environment is based on traditional Hindu belief system that sees everything as interconnected and an integral part of the natural environment (28-9). This understanding on the part of the author and the female protagonist demands that they accept the "forces of nature as invincible" (28). Zeleny makes two points here: 1) everything in the ecosystem is interconnected; 2) forces of nature are invincible. On the basis of these two points, Zeleny deduces: "through Rukmani's relationship with her environment, Markandaya advocates a traditional mindset where respect and concern for all life supercedes progress" (29). Both the points are valid as Zeleny provides ample textual examples. However, what Zeleny does not talk about is the apparent ambivalence of Rukmani's attitude toward the environment, and life in general. Her acceptance of Ira's prostitution, her callousness at youngest son's deteriorating health, her rejection to pay back to the soil, all these instances are ignored in Zeleny's treatment.

Rukmani's attitude toward her environment is always very practical. Even her disappointment at the birth of her daughter (15) is justifiable in the circumstances that she is in. Being the wife of a poor peasant, she knows how important it is to have more helping hands in the form of sons in the field when all they have for their survival is the yield from the field. When her youngest son cries for hunger and almost chokes to death, she says: "So much the better...it will be one mouth less to feed" (84). Acute descriptions of poverty and hunger that

Markandaya gives through the narrative of Rukmani is sufficient for the justification of Rukmani's callous attitude.

Thereafter we fed on whatever we could find: the soft ripe fruit of the prickly pear; a sweet potato or two, blackened and half rotten, thrown away by some more prosperous hand...sometimes a crab...a few bamboo shoots; a stick of sugar cane left in some deserted field, or a piece of coconut picked from the gutter in the town...for every edible plant or root there was a struggle—a desperate competition that made enemies of friends and put an end to humanity. (85-6)

Rukmani is not even short of killing a fellow human being—Kunthi—when she thinks that she comes to steal her rice in the darkness of the night (95). Not only does hunger make “enemies of friends” (86), the relationship between parents and children also undergoes a change as Usha Pathania in her *Human Bonds and Bondages: The Fiction of Anita Desai and Kamala*

*Markandaya* observes:

Financial implications often determine the nature and quality of interaction between the parents and children. The relationship between Ira and her parents in the *Nectar in a Sieve* suggests that children are obedient, meek and submissive as long as the parents are responsive to their needs. When children have to look after their parents, their attitudes undergo unbelievable changes. They tend to become defiant. (148)

To fight hunger, Ira defies her father and mother and takes to prostitution. Her parents also give a silent consent when they see that the income from her prostitution can provide sustenance, albeit meager, to the family: “It was as simple as that we forbade, she insisted, we lost. So we got used to her comings and goings, as we had got used to so much else. With her earnings Irrawady was able to buy rice and salt, and milk for the child...After the roots and leavings we had existed on,

I was grateful enough for the food” (98-99). Hence, “the bookish norms of propriety and obedience operate under congenial and placid circumstances. A hungry man is forced to surrender his values, to act against his cherished convictions” (Pathania 148). Both Ira by selling her body in exchange for money, and her parents by allowing her to do that, forget their cultural and religious identity, as their material reality forces them to rethink their priorities.

Rukmani and her husband represent an acutely oppressed class of peasants. Their immediate concerns are survival and their biggest enemy is hunger. S.Z.H. Abidi in his *kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve: A Critical Study* observes:

The story of *Nectar In A Sieve* reveals the terrible theme of hunger. Hunger stares in the face of Nathan's family due to failure of crops either because of lack of rains or of its excess. Old Granny dies of starvation. Kunthi is driven to blackmailing. Hunger debases human beings; it brings degradation. Ira takes to prostitution. In the figure of Kunthi and Ira who are diametrically opposed to each other in their approach to hunger, the novelist has illustrated the inner degradation that hunger brings. (38)

Abidi however blames Nature for all the calamities that befall the community. He sees the encroachment of industrialization in the form of tannery only partially responsible for the disruption in the lives of characters. “The Tannery is responsible for only a little disturbance and turmoil in the life of Rukmani. The real tragedy of their lives arises from the vagaries of Nature and the things ensuing from them” (38). Abidi seems to ignore that besides “vagaries of Nature” and encroachment of industrialization, there are other elements too that become a big cause of tragedy in Nathan and Rukmani’s life. Rahmat Jahan in “‘Nectar in a Sieve’: A Tale of Hunger, Starvation and Death” has recognized the “high handedness of the moneylenders and Zamindari system” to be another cause of tragedy in the novel (201) The Loss of land that Nathan and

Rukmani lease from a landlord is the biggest loss that they suffer. When Sivaji, the landlord's manager asks Nathan to either pay the rent or return the land, Nathan is ready to sell all his belongings including pots and pans, clothes, the meager food reserve and even the bullocks that they have: "Rather these should go...than that the land should be taken from us; we can do without these, but if the land is gone, our livelihood is gone, and we must henceforth wander like jackals" (*Nectar* 73). In this instance, the relationship of the landlord and the poor peasant is significant. Although, Nathan and Rukmani live in the post-independence India, they are still under the colonial/imperial rule. Fanon in *Wretched of Earth* asserts: "Decolonization is quite simply the replacing of a certain 'species' of men by another 'species' of men. Without any period of transition, there is a total, complete, and absolute substitution" (35). The landlord in the novel represents that 'species' of men who have taken the place of former foreign colonizers. Consequently, the poor in the society is still not free. It is "the tragedy of uprooting of Nathan and Rukmani from their native village" that is the central theme of the novel (Jahan 201). Poor peasants' relationships with their environment have to be seen in the context of their status as oppressed by the neocolonial masters. Nathan and Rukmani are willing to sacrifice all their belonging to keep the land but their circumstances force them to use survival strategies that at times are apparently harmful for their land.

In such circumstances, judging characters' actions by Western standards of ecofeminism would be misleading. All their actions represent survival tactics that they are forced to employ. By letting Kenny criticize Rukmani for not using dung as a fertilizer, Markhandaya sheds light on the urgency of their other needs. Safety from dampness and heat are more urgent than fertilizing the land with dung that would later yield better. Some practices that appear to be selfish on the part of women, after this alternative analysis, prove to be more selfless. Women-

nature connectedness is very obvious in the text. Rukmani time and again feminizes nature and naturalizes women. Her garden imagery throughout the text is reflective of both, consider for instance the word choice in the quotation used above: “seeds,” “fattening,” “swelled,” and “ripened.” (10). She clearly depicts her fertile patch of land as a woman’s womb. Yet there is ambivalence in how Rukmani treats her natural environment. Her connection with nature does not determine her relationship with nature and life in general. Consequently, when women are found involved in practices that are harmful for life, it can be interpreted as an act of selflessness where they think about other humans more than they think about themselves. Her silent approval on her “reputedly barren” (62) daughter’s prostitution, Rukmani is coming to terms with the fact that Ira’s sacrifice in form of prostitution will save others from starving to death. Similarly, her decision to use dung to keep her family safe from cold is a choice that she has to make between two calamities—cold and dampness and no yield from the land—one closer than the other. Rukmani reflects on the apparent selfishness of everyone in the community in an attempt to survive: “for every edible plant and root there was struggle—a desperate competition that made enemies of friends and put an end to humanity” (86). This realization calls to consider the “resource use context” and social “relations of power” that Bronwyn James proposes in her “Is Ecofeminism Relevant?” (10), to interpret the actions and choices of the oppressed.

All the three novels discussed portray female characters in unique and diverse ways. The traditional women-nature connectedness is manifest in all the examples. *Chemmeen* portrays women in their symbolic and spiritual connections with nature where they have a power to affect the lives of the community members. The sea, which is the source of community’s livelihood, is ‘feminized,’ hence acknowledged for its life-giving attribute, just like women. It is the abode of a goddess who is willful and capricious and can play with the lives of fisherman by her “devilish

dance” (Pillai 219). She can even starve the fishers when she “ha[s] her periods” (59) and goes “barren” (65). In practical roles however, women in *Chemmeen*, just like men are at the mercy of the sea. They are bound by the tradition to be “pure” (9) so that they do not enrage the goddess of the sea that can in turn destroy the entire community: “The womenfolk on the coast had no peace of mind. From the moment the boats were launched, it was a matter of tears and wailing. They had peace only after the boats came on shore” (160-1). In *The Village by the Sea* too, there are different categories of women portrayed and all have diverse relationship with their environment. Those who depend on the natural resources are closer to nature and appear almost in biomorphic unity with nature, like Bela and Kamal. However there are those women too who are not so ‘close to nature,’ like Hema and her mother. *Nectar in a Sieve* also manifests traditional women-nature connectedness where nature is ‘feminized’ and women are ‘naturalized.’ Embodiment of both women and nature is a striking feature of the novel; nonetheless, this connectedness does not ensure any special relationship with nature that would be any different from that of men’s.

Seen from mainstream ecofeminist perspective, the disruptive and harmful practices of the characters would reflect internalized patriarchal values that inferiorize nature. These practices can be interpreted as ‘internalized misogyny’, ‘oppressive othering’, and ‘internalized oppression’ on the part of women. Because women are considered to be caring and compassionate for all forms of life, any practice that damages nature can only be defined as a result of women’s inability to claim their attributes that value life. Seen from a postcolonial ecofeminist perspective, the apparently harmful practices yield different interpretations.

The study of the texts shows that women-nature connectedness exists; however, the relationship of women with nature/environment differs from case to case. It is hard to

denominate one type of relationship since it all depends, as James Bronwyn has observed, on the “social relations of power of gender, race, age, and status” (10) that in turn determine their material conditions. These diverse relationships then complicate the widely accepted ecofeminist notion of women’s inherent “compassion” for all forms of life (plant 1). The examples from the texts have shown that women in fishing and agrarian communities of India have to use survival tactics every day and that might not leave any room for compassion for life in general, other than their own or that of their loved ones. Their attitudes, forced in part by neo-colonial economic contexts in each of the novels, in turn may be harmful for the environment around them, eventually oppressive. Hence, Western standards of ecofeminism do not suffice for the ecofeminism of the ‘global south.’ The idealized and romantic image of nature that the Western ecofeminists envision cannot be materialized in the lives of fisher and agrarian communities of India. Ynestra King, one of the earliest ecofeminist activists, laments over the loss of “magical powers and properties” of nature during the wake of “Western industrial civilization” that reduced nature merely to a resource “to be exploited by human beings to fulfill human needs and purposes which were defined in opposition to nature (20). The textual examples provided in the study do not match with King’s idealized version of nature because even before the encroachment of industrialization, these communities have to depend on their natural environment as a “resource” that sustains them. In attempts for survival, the oft-romanticized peasant and fisher, man and woman, can even indulge in harming his/her environment. These examples do not pose challenge to ecofeminist assertions that women in the developing countries are responsible for the sustenance of their families. However, the examples do call for a revision of the ecofeminist assertions that women universally have a relationship of compassion toward their environment and the absence of feminine principle is result of internalized patriarchal



values, and that women's connection with nature would always mean that women and nature stand in opposition to men or vice versa.

## CHAPTER 4. WOMEN, LAND, BODY

In this chapter I claim that the so-called symbolic women-nature assemblage, especially women-land connection and the resulting women-land embodiment, in the poor South-Asian societies, is more than just symbolic. For mainstream ecofeminism, one of the reasons for a women-land connection and their embodiment is the reproductive ability of both. Textual examples from *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya and *Water* by Bapsi Sidhwa support my claim that in the presented postcolonial societies, women's bodies are not just symbolically connected to land but are actually treated as land in the form of prostitution. I also analyze Sohaila Abdulali's *Madwoman of Jogare*, which on the one hand serves as a counter example that epitomizes mainstream ecofeminism, as opposed to postcolonial ecofeminism, and on the other hand helps to complicate the notion of embodiment.

The question of 'body' or 'embodiment' is extremely important in feminist and ecofeminist discourse. Many feminists detest the association of women with body because the mind/body dualism excludes women from the cultural sphere that mind represents (Field 39). Cultural ecofeminists, since they acknowledge a women-nature connection, stress reclaiming body and the bodily realm, which causes some to eventually label them essentialists. Greta Gaard in her "Ecofeminism Re-visited" expresses her amazement on the attitude of poststructuralist and other third-wave feminisms that focused only on spiritual ecofeminism and cultural ecofeminism's critique of patriarchy and "portrayed all ecofeminisms as an exclusively essentialist equation of women with nature, discrediting ecofeminism's diversity of arguments and standpoints" (31). Gaard strongly rejects the allegation and states:

The charges against ecofeminists as essentialist, ethnocentric, anti-intellectual goddess-worshippers who mistakenly portray the Earth as female or issue totalizing and

ahistorical mandates for worldwide veganism—these sweeping generalizations, often made without specific and supporting documentation, have been disproven again and again in the pages of academic and popular journals, at conferences and in conversations, yet the contamination lingers. (32)

For Gaard, equating sex and gender, while disregarding the difference of race and class, homogenizes and essentializes women. Womanhood, for her is not a unified experience since there are elite women who oppress other women and nature alike (36). Feminist and environmental philosopher Terri Field takes an interesting stance where she claims to be a non-essentialist, yet considers body to be indispensable for ecofeminism: “Given that it is our bodies that have situated us as ‘mere’ nature, animality, flesh, immanence, I suggest that it is to our bodies that we should turn to to rethink these notions” (56). Field calls for deconstructing and theorizing embodiment from an ecofeminist perspective. She asserts that reclaiming body only to exclude it from a devaluation that mind/body dualism entails is not enough. My theorizing postcolonial ecofeminism would also reject appeals to ignore female bodies and how they are represented.

From a postcolonial ecofeminist perspective, I would argue that as long as rape and prostitution are lived experiences of women, where rape of women reflects extreme oppression on the basis of gender, and prostitution is a means of sustenance, embodiment of both nature and women cannot be set aside. As Field asserts, it “expose[s] the illusionary division between dualistic terms” (40), and it will also provide an “escape route” (Plumwood 20) from the twin domination of women and nature. The specific textual examples that I provide are from the South-Asian societies but rape and prostitution is not only a South-Asian phenomenon, it happens almost everywhere in the world. Prostitution all over the world is used for economic

survival. Yet, using a postcolonial ecofeminist lens to understand women's experiences of rape and prostitution will help deconstruct mind/body dualism where women's body is inferiorized and related to nature to justify the oppression of both, women and nature.

Women-land association is a cultural phenomenon. Cultural historian Constance Classen in her *The Book of Touch* sheds light on this culturally constructed association and provides certain textual examples that show that "earth's body is often taken to be a female body" (31). She considers symbolic connection between "women, nature, home, and property" to be the cause of feminized earth (31). Most of her examples show earth/land seen as a woman's body, however she also provides an interesting example where John Donne, a famous metaphysical poet sees a woman's body as land:

O my America! my new-found-land,  
My kingdom, safest when with one man mann'd,  
My Myne of precious stones, My Empirie,  
How blest am I in this discovering thee!  
To enter in these bonds, is to be free;  
Then where my hand is set, my seal shall be. (qtd. in Classen)

Donne's example is significant here as he is famous for his metaphysical conceits, where his similes and metaphors are regarded as fanciful. Traditionally, it is only land that is symbolically referred to as a female; referring to a female as land however is a farfetched idea. Textual examples that I provide also show women being treated as land where this connection is not farfetched. The Western conception of the symbolic connection between women and land where terms like fertile, barren, mother, womb, seed, rape etc. are used for women and land cannot be merely considered as symbolic in the Third World societies that the texts represent, nor can they

be rejected as essentialist. Female characters that the chosen texts present are actually treated as land where they are leased out to ‘reproduce’ when ‘fertile’ and ‘rented’ for other pleasurable activities when ‘barren’. The commodification of women’s bodies in such contexts sheds light on the acute oppression of women where their connection with, and treatment like land provides a logic of domination to the oppressor. Treating land as a woman’s body also provides logic of domination as man has always considered woman’s body as his rightful property; seeing land as woman’s body gives a similar sense of authority over land where every virgin piece of land is thought to be waiting to be ‘husbanded’. Oppression and exploitation on the basis of embodiment of women and nature, land in this context, is so complex that rejecting this woman-land/nature connection as essentialist might do more harm than good.

### **Nectar in a Sieve**

*Nectar in a Sieve*, as Rahmat Jahan’s article title sums up is “A Tale of Hunger, Starvation and Death.” The society that Markandaya presents in her novel is not an ideal, happy, healthy and wealthy society of India. On the contrary, the text shows us a society of extremely poor peasants who are at the mercy of landlords, moneylenders, and nature. In this society where “the struggle is between man and overpowering hunger, before which honour, morality, and even God do not count” (Jahan 202), standards of a prosperous society do not apply. The novel presents a community in which almost every act of each individual is a survival tactic, a step to fight hunger and starvation.

Women’s roles in the given society are significant. They not only have to play the traditional caretaker role to maintain the equilibrium of the family unit, they also work along with men to provide sustenance to their respective families. Provision of sustenance takes the form of physically helping men in their fields and tending to home gardens. There is yet another

unique way of providing sustenance when the land doesn't yield enough. Women use their bodies instead to make up for the loss from the land. Kunthi and Ira are two such characters in the novel.

Kunthi is one of the central characters of the novel, whose body literally becomes a resource like land. Kunthi's husband is impotent, as a result she cannot reproduce "lustly sons" (12). Not having sons in a peasant family is a tragedy in itself. A farmer needs helping hands in the form of sons and a lack thereof would mean restricted farming and less food for consumption. Kunthi finds prostitution as a way to cover up this lack as well as her husband's impotence. Her prostitution does give her and her husband sons who would help in the fields in the short term but disillusioned by industrial encroachment and unfavorable weather conditions resulting in bad crops, the sons leave their parents and the traditional way of life, leaving Kunthi no other option but prostitution again. Interestingly, the character's initial choice to engage in prostitution works toward the goal of reproduction rather than simple exchange of sexual intimacy for money or food. The text in this way emphasizes a connection between Kunthi's body and the land they farm.

Later, she does use her body to earn money or food in exchange. She is a strong woman who knows how to take care of herself. Prostitution on her part shows her extreme struggle to fight hunger. She uses her body for survival as long as she is capable of doing so. Kunthi's act of prostitution not only hints upon her role as a sustainer but also sheds light on the role of her impotent husband. He assumes the role of a landlord who leases out his land in exchange of 'product' and money. He is incapable of sowing 'seeds' and 'harvesting' his land, so he conveniently allows those to use the land who can. In ordinary circumstances, religious and cultural norms would demand both Kunthi and her husband to guard each other's honor.

However, in the circumstances they are in, traditions, norms, morality, and religion have no room.

One cultural aspect of such societies where men (and even women) want sons only is ironic because it is always a woman who bears sons. So men are dependent on women. Seen closely however, what appears as ironic is in fact a stark economic factor. In Rukmani's own words: "[Nathan] had wanted a son to continue his line and walk beside him on the land, not a puling infant who would take with her a dowry and leave nothing but a memory behind" (16). In the novel, the irony persists since eventually it is women again that these men (Kunthi's husband and Nathan) depend on. Kunthi's husband depends on her body to be used as a prostitute to give him sons and later to earn money when the sons have their own families to look after. Nathan's sons also go away to earn their own living; he depends on Rukmani's garden and Ira's earnings from prostitution.

From mainstream ecofeminist perspective, Kunthi's sons' denial to support her when she is in need is reflective of men's attitude toward those who provide them sustenance in the first place and those they depend on for their existence—women and land. Considering the economic factors however, sons' denial to stay with their mother and provide for her can be explained in another way. When young men see that there is nothing left for farming, they have no other choice but to go out and find other means. Besides, there are their wives and kids that they have to support. Kunthi also realizes this as when Rukmani suggests her to ask her sons for help, she says: "My sons are not mine alone. They have wives. I would never approach them now. I can look after myself; but first the bloom must come back" (81). Their inability to provide for their old parents is an economic factor. It is exactly like Rukmani's apparently callous attitude toward her youngest son's hunger. They can only survive when there are fewer mouths to feed. Going

away and leaving the traditional way of life for men can be paralleled with women's letting go of their morality and chastity. Men going away and leaving their cultural identity as farmers, and the tradition, and women becoming prostitutes while letting go of their cultural and religious identity, both are survival strategies.

More than one female character in the text becomes conflated with land and oppressed for inability to reproduce. Ira, Rukmani's daughter, returns back to her parents because she "cannot bear" and "her husband has no use for her" (60). Apparently Ira has lost one use of her body—reproduction—like a barren land. However, Ira also *leases out* her body to be used by other men for exchange of money. She uses her body for the sustenance of the family at the time when Nathan's and Rukmani's efforts fail. Just like Kunthi's husband, Ira's parents also accept her prostitution. Rukmani narrates: "It was as simple as that we forbade, she insisted, we lost. So we got used to her comings and goings, as we had got used to so much else. With her earnings Irrawady was able to buy rice and salt, and milk for the child...After the roots and leavings we had existed on, I was grateful enough for the food" (98-99). Ira's prostitution is an act of sacrifice that she does for others around her for whom she is not even directly responsible. She lies wounded and bleeding on the bed but she still thinks for Kuti, her little brother: "Feed him; he is hungry. Take the rupee you will find in my sari" (97). Here again the cultural and religious identity of Ira as being a chaste woman and her parents as guardians of her chastity, takes a secondary status when the lives are at stake. Her embodiment becomes a very real way to sustain the family rather than a symbolic connection to the land.

### **Water**

*Water* deals with the theme of sustenance in more subtle ways. It does not address the issues of land providing sustenance but it clearly portrays women's bodies being used for



sustenance, that is reflective of men's attitude toward all 'others'. In a patriarchal society women are related to nature and everything that is 'low' because they are not related to 'man'. *Water* deals with the theme of patriarchal domination as the cause of not only widows' oppression but the oppression and domination of the entire nation.

The novel is set in the 1930s during the time of Gandhi's Freedom movement against the British rule. Gandhi's political struggle also entailed social justice, especially women's rights and the rights of untouchables (Mercanti 167). The story begins with six-year old Chuyia's carefree childhood that soon ends when her poor Brahmin father decides to marry her off to a 44-year old well off Brahmin, despite Chuyia's mother Bhagya's protest. Bhagya's objections are rejected, as her husband thinks, according to the tradition: "A girl is destined to leave her parents' home early or she will bring disgrace to it. She is safe and happy only in her husband's care... a woman is recognized as a person only when she is one with her husband" (*Water* 14). After having given her in marriage, Chuyia's parents lost their rights over her (28). Chuyia lives in her parents' home, as is the custom for pre-pubescent brides. However, hearing the news of her husband's serious illness, she is sent off to him so that she can spend those few days as a married woman until he dies. Her husband's death wouldn't mean an ordinary widowhood:

In Brahmin culture, once widowed, a woman was deprived of her useful function in society—that of reproducing and fulfilling her duties to her husband. She ceased to exist as a person: she was no longer a daughter or a daughter-in-law. There was no place for her in the community and she was viewed as a threat to society. A woman's sexuality and fertility, which was so valuable in his lifetime, was converted upon his death into a potential danger to the morality of the community. (32)

Chuyia's widowhood is materialized by breaking her bangles, taking away her *mangal-sutra*, shaving her head, and dressing her in a homespun white cloth and eventually sending her off to the widow's ashram. Her body is altered to match her new circumstance against her will.

The widows' ashram is a place that is run by widows who do not receive any regular external support, financial or otherwise. Indeed, the very existence of the ashram is proof of the oppression of women who are of no "use" to the families they belong to. A widow is useless for the family of her departed husband and even a greater burden for her own family if she returns to her parents because they have already fulfilled their responsibility once by giving her in marriage either with or without a dowry. Madhumati is the head of the ashram because "her family made a donation to the temple in the city" (56). Her character that apparently is not to be seen in the positive light invokes pity when she tells her story:

I was brought up to give orders and command all my life. That is why I could stand up to that [] mother-in-law of mine when I became a widow! I boldly asked for part of my dowry and some ancestral property to live off of...I fought back demanding what was mine! 'Take care of this brazen hussy!' she told her sons. The two bastards raped me for a week. I was shorn and beaten and taken twenty miles into the wilderness and discarded.  
(85-86)

When she was brought to the ashram as a fourteen-year-old widow, she was used by the head of the ashram as a prostitute to earn money for the sustenance of the widows of the ashram. Later she herself becomes the head and uses Kalyani just as she herself was used. This *side business* of the ashram becomes very significant as it sheds light on the role of women who use their bodies, or are forced to use their bodies, to give a sustainable life to others around them. Ironically, ashrams are built to keep widows away from the society, as it is feared that the widows could be

potential temptresses for men. However, as the text suggests, these ashrams work like brothels where widows are sent to the “clients” in exchange of money. The widows’ ability to sustain themselves through prostitution is not only the proof of extreme patriarchal oppression, it also hints upon the instrumental value of women, like land, where upon losing one function in the society—that of a married women—their bodies are put to another use.

Because these widows are considered nonfunctional members of the society, even the ashram that is built for them does not provide them proper means of living. They either have to “perform” at the temple by:

[Singing] Lord Krishna’s and Radha’s names to bless their benefactors and grant the request of supplicants to cure a sick person, or get a job, or to benefit their business. They [benefactors] paid the temple priests and the widows were given a cup of rice and a fistful of lentils for every eight-hour session of singing and dancing. For many widows this was their only means of sustenance. On those days when a widow was too sick to perform, she starved. (60)

Or they have to beg outside the temple, for “without these handouts, they would starve” (117). Both, “performing” at the temple and “begging” outside the temple are means of personal sustenance—“a cup of rice and a fistful of lentils” or some “coins.” There are other expenses too like the rent of the ashram that the “head” of the ashram is to worry about. This larger financial need is met by using widows’ bodies: “Every penny from Kalyani’s work [prostitution] goes to pay the rent” (135). The text clearly reveals this by showing how at every time there is at least one widow who is serving this function. It is only such a widow who is more ‘valuable’ to the ashram. Madhumati who is notorious for her bad temper is very nice to Kalyani: “you must take

care of yourself. You are the jewel of this house, if you are happy, our clients are happy. And if they are happy, I'm happy" (152).

Madhumati's character is also important in other ways. The ashram represents an institution of the society run by all women. Madhumati in this institution appears to represent patriarchy where she ensures that the hierarchical power structures are maintained. Although each resident of the ashram has a similar status in the society—a widow; however within the ashram there are some who are more powerful than the others. By assuming the role of the head of the ashram, Madhumati has the absolute power.

Madhumati hobbled precariously to the *takht*, her accustomed perch in the courtyard, and sat down heavily on the weathered planks. In contrast to the stringy widows, Madhumati had an abundance of slack flesh that made her look much older than her fifty-odd years, and though she wore the same drab white drab sari as the other widows and her grey hair was as closely cropped to her scalp, she was clearly the ruler of the dilapidated *ashram*.  
(51)

Shakuntala is also above many other widows for she belongs to a rich family and is also educated in scripture. Kalyani has an ambivalent status. She is the sustainer of the ashram. The only *real* income of the ashram is through her prostitution. Because of her prostitution, she is allowed to have long hair and is also taken care of. Some other widows, like Kunti, look down upon her as they consider her impure. For Chuyia Kalyani is like an "angel" (62). Among the rest "the very young and the very old belong together" (56). Chuyia and the very old widows are at the farthest margins. Madhumati maintains this hierarchy. She is harsh and ruthless toward other widows. From an alternative perspective, Madhumati's actions and choices are survival tactics. For widows there are little other means of income unless they use their bodies in

prostitution. Like men or even other women of the society, they cannot adopt any usual, socially acceptable means of economic sustenance. Madhumati has no other choice but to nominate one of the widows as the sole provider. She even tries to use Chuyia, as young as she is, for prostitution because she knows Kalyani will not always be young and beautiful. Madhumati herself has been through this stage and she understands that this is their only option. When Kalyani tells Madhumati about her affair with Narayan and his marriage proposal, Madhumati retorts saying: “Shameless! You’ll sink yourself and us! We’ll be cursed. We must live in purity to die in purity” (169). Disgusted by Madhumati’s hypocrisy for forcing her to prostitute and preaching purity, Kalyani confronts her: “Then why did you send me across the river [to a client]?” (170). Infuriated Madhumati responds: “For survival! And how we survive here, no one can question. Not even God!” (170). Madhumati’s callousness at the death of Bua and her using Kalyani and Chuyia as a prostitute can well be compared to Rukmani’s apparent carelessness for her youngest son at the verge of death for hunger and Ira’s prostitution. Madhumati in this light need not be seen as having internalized patriarchy where she is oppressing other women. She is a woman who has been through oppression and finds no way out of it except perpetuating it. She is not the origin of oppression; she is one of the victims.

Gulabi, the eunuch, represents a very significant character of the novel. She serves as the go-between and a pimp for Madhumati and other ashrams’ heads too. Her character resembles, both in function and significance to that of Sivaji in *Nectar in a Sieve*. The way Sivaji works as the go-between for Nathan and the landlord, so does Gulabi. Sivaji and Gulabi have no burden on their conscience because they are doing as they are bid. Because of these go-betweens, the exchange, on land and money in one case and women and money in the other, is just performed

as a business transaction where no emotions, pity or care is involved between the two parties. The oppressor saves his face by never directly dealing with the oppressed.

Eminent ecofeminists like Karen Warren, Chaia Heller, and Greta Gaard believe that all types of oppression are interconnected, are result of the patriarchal domination, and are ecofeminist issues—hence the liberation of all together is the solution of the problem. *Water* brings in a very significant issue in this regard. The text addresses the theme of national freedom in direct relation to the liberation of widows, who are initially discarded by their respective families as ‘useless’ and later ‘used’ for their bodies. Narayan who is a staunch follower of Gandhi believes that every type of oppression is interconnected and liberation of the widows and that of the nation goes hand in hand. On Rabindra’s comment about his father’s attitude to the widows—“My father doesn’t even bother with their names...,”—Narayan cuts him midsentence and asks him to convince his father to “join Gandhi!” (90). Rabindra’s response to this is mocking yet alluding to the fact that oppression of every type is connected and liberation of all together is the solution of the problem: “Seth Bhupindernath and Gandhi, hand in hand, will liberate the Widows of India from their plight” (91). Gulabi also quotes Gandhi in front of Madhumati: “Gandhi says, ‘the untouchables are the children of God’” (124), “and he says, ‘widows are stranger to love and nobody should be a stranger to love’” (180).

There is yet another ecofeminist complexity in the text that we find in the character of Gulabi. Gulabi is an intersex or a queer person, to be more general, who does not fit in the male/female binary. Greta Gaard in her “Toward a Queer Ecofeminism” has tried to give a new dimension to ecofeminism. She argues that if ecofeminism has recognized that all forms of oppression are ecofeminist issues, then the oppression of the ‘queer’ should also be included in the ecofeminist debate, if ecofeminism claims to be all-inclusive. There are references in the text

that show that Gulabi uses her body for prostitution, for instance she tells Madhumati: “I have enough admirers” when Madhumati asks her not to show her “wretched privates” (126). Besides, Gulabi is also a pimp who settles deals between the ‘clients’ and the ‘heads’ of various ashrams. Gulabi’s character is the example of extreme oppression of the weak in the society who are considered as ‘useless’. While telling Madhumati about Gandhi’s views about widows, Gulabi’s apparent self-mocking comment is very insightful: “Next he will be saying, ‘*Hijras* are the children of God!’ Gulabi stopped laughing and then she said, ‘if untouchables are ‘children of God’ then eunuchs are His step-children! Even our earthly mother-father have no claim on us” (125). Later in the text, Gulabi again comments on the oppression and neglect of eunuchs: “Why doesn’t he [Gandhi] say Hijras are strangers to love? He should spare a thought or two of pity for us eunuchs” (180). Gulabi’s views complete the picture of oppression that Narayan and Gandhi are unable to see. Liberation of the widows as well as eunuch, and all those who are treated as ‘others’, goes hand in hand with the liberation of India from the colonizers.

Sidhwa seems to be sarcastic about the idea of “self-liberation” that widows are expected to do. On the surface level, widows are put in ashrams, devoid of luxuries of life so that they can seek penance of their sins that caused their husband’s deaths. So an ashram provides them space to seek liberation from the self by shunning all the luxuries of life like tasty food, colorful clothes etc. Shakuntala is a character who is well versed in the scripture and a devout widow. When Sadananda, the priest asks her: “So many years of service and devotion. Do you feel any closer to self liberation?” Shakuntala did not answer immediately. She said, ‘If self-liberation means detachment from worldly desires, then no, I’m no closer to it’” (115). Shakuntala thinks about the plight of widows and asks Sadananda: “Panditji, is it written that widows should be treated badly?” (184). The other option that Panditji tells her besides leading a life of self-denial and

praying for the husband's soul is *sati* where woman kills herself by mounting her husband's pyre. Sadananda also tells her about a recently passed law for widow's marriage that she is surprised to know as widows were kept unaware of this law. For Sidhwa, the liberation that widows want is not from the self but from the oppression that they receive at the hands of patriarchy. As long as they are treated as 'things'—nonhuman others—to be used for their instrumental value, there is no liberation. Sidhwa has strategically paralleled the themes of national liberation—liberation of the land from the colonizers, and liberation of widows and eunuchs from patriarchy.

The embodiment of both women and nature resulting from women-nature connectedness reveals that women's bodies are treated the way land is treated in a patriarchal society—for its instrumental value. Women in the selected texts—Kunthi, Ira, Madhumati, Kalyani and Gulabi are all aware of the fact that like land, they have the ability to sustain lives around them by using their bodies in prostitution. It also reflects the attitude of men toward these women who also treat these women bodies just as they would treat their lands—for its instrumental value.

Such instances of prostitution are different from institutionalized prostitution. In the texts, prostitution is being practiced as a survival tactic, unlike the institutionalized prostitution that seems more like a business. In both the cases prostitution is used as means of income. Julia O'Connell Davidson in her *Prostitution, Power, and Freedom* defines Prostitution as “an institution which founders upon the existence of economic and political conditions that compel people to act in ways in which they would not otherwise choose to act” (4). In both the novels, female characters succumb to prostitution when there are no other means of survival left, when it is a matter of life and death. In such situations, the question is not whether prostitution institutionalizes oppression or not; on the contrary, it is a strategy to cope with the economic



oppression that leaves no other option for the marginalized members of the society, when the only accessible sustaining entity is the female body. In her study of the Bollywood (mainstream Indian cinema) films, “Bollywood Baffled over Sex, Rape and Prostitution,” Rita Banerji brings to light certain Indian traditions that legitimized rape/prostitution. She refers to forced marriage where girls are forced to marry a person of their parents’ choice; institutionalized rape where girls are married to their rapists; Dev-dasi tradition which is also a form of prostitution where a girl is married to the god of a local temple where she lives and is raped by the priests and other visitors of the temple (para. 30) in exchange for room and board; and sex trafficking where parents of the girls set the price of their daughters’ virginity in a ceremony attended by the villagers. In all these situations, Banerji views the victims’ response as “deep, self-destructive internalization of the abuse that renders it 'normal' and acceptable in women's minds, and thus helps its perpetuation” (para 33). In *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Water*, women accept prostitution not because they have internalized oppression. On the contrary they adopt it as a survival tactic.

Rape and prostitution both are offspring of oppression, however, conflating the two may result in misreading the cause of oppression and the agency of the oppressed. Prostitution, most often than not, is caused by economic oppression. Prostitution is carried out like a business transaction where something is earned in exchange of services. In both the texts discussed above, prostitution is one of the main themes. It is also significant to note here that female authors have written both the texts. Portraying their female characters as prostitutes show their characters as independent, who have a right on their own bodies, amidst all other types of oppression. Ira and Kunthi go against religion and culture and make use of their bodies to support themselves and others. Kalyani, although is forced to prostitute still shows women’s struggle against economic

oppression. A rape victim on the other hand would be totally at the mercy of the offender. A prostitute on the other hand devises prostitution as a means of sustenance.

### **Mad Woman of Jogare**

*Madwoman of Jogare* presents a contrast to the experiences of women in *Chemmeen*, *Nectar in a Sieve*, and *Village by the Sea* discussed in chapter three, and *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Water* discussed in this chapter above. I have used *Chemmeen*, *Nectar in a Sieve*, and *Village by the Sea* as examples to show that women's material conditions determine their relationship with their environment. Their socialization as nurturers and caretakers does not guarantee a relationship of care and compassion toward nature. These texts also helped me show that there is usually no difference between men's and women's relationship with nature, although the texts clearly depict women nature connection. I have used *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Water* as examples in this chapter that help me support my claim that mainstream Western ecofeminism is inadequate to explain women-land association in the Third World downtrodden rural societies. *Madwoman of Jogare* does not deal with the issue of prostitution as *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Water* do, however it works as an example ecofeminist text that reclaims body in less oppressive ways. *Madwoman of Jogare* also works as a counter example that epitomizes Western ecofeminism where the only reason for environmental oppression is internalized patriarchal ideology that not only connects women and nature but also inferiorized both, in contrast to the other texts discussed in chapter three that depict women's and men's material conditions as an additional cause of environmental oppression. *Madwoman of Jogare* as Sohaila Abdulali's ecofeminist statement dismantles the dualisms of man/woman, man/nature, high class/low class, human/animal, reason/spirituality, and modernity/tradition as an attempt to subvert ideological discourse that supports these

dualisms. Other texts present these dualisms as an ugly reality that shapes the lives of men and women of the downtrodden South-Asian societies.

Abdulali divides her characters in the categories of good and bad; those who subvert the patriarchal ideology, and those who uphold the patriarchal ideology. Female protagonist Ifrat and her parents and most of the member of TUCS—an organization for the tribal upliftment and cultural studies—are good characters who stand for an ecosphere that comprises of a valley in Karjat, (Maharashtra, India), nonhuman lives in the valley, indigenous and the foreign human residents of the valley, and river Kallai. Abdulali presents how the ecosphere is disturbed by bad characters when Arun (son of Ifrat's father's childhood friend) purchases vast fertile land to fulfill his development plan. Abdulali does not appear to reject development in general but she certainly critiques those developmental programs that do more harm than good to the residents of the valley. Her narrative is a sharp critique of the government's forest department that deprives the adivasis of the natural resources of the valley they depend on for their sustenance. For the so-called preservation of jungle, the guards are not short of harming one life (human) for the sake of another (tree).

The narrative begins like a typical environmental text presenting the beautiful natural imagery. The conventional depiction of the natural imagery is seamlessly blended with the introduction of extremely unconventional female protagonist Ifrat.

Ifrat spit some seeds, whistled and then pulled down her shorts and squatted on the hard ground. She scabbled about in the dried mud for a suitable spot to pee and whistled back at the koel... 'I fertilize you with red, O karwanda bush!' she announced, and wondered as she walked away how many tampons she had buried in the valley over the years. (1)

Ifrat as well as her parents Abu and Farzana Shekpali are a fine combination of tradition and modernity. The quote above portrays her as opposed to what a traditional Indian female is like. She and her family are unique characters that defy many social norms. The family together shows a great concern for the ecosphere where 'life' in general is more important than anything else. Arun Pruthi, son of Abu Shekpali's childhood friend is seen as an intruder who poses a threat to the valley. Arun represents destruction and death in the form of technology. As already mentioned, Abdulali does not oppose modernity or technology in general but she certainly condemns, through her characters, those aspect of technology that are harmful for the ecosphere.

On the one hand, leaving the possibility of a luxurious life in the metropolitan Bombay, Shekpalis prefer a simple life away from technology that apparently is in line with the traditional life of the villagers around. The very concept of the madwoman in the novel hints toward spirituality where a madwoman communes with the forces of nature and forecasts the arrival of monsoon. On the other hand Shekpalis represent a completely modern family that does not conform to tradition and religious dogma. They support TUCS that works for the betterment of the adivasis and even acknowledge adivasis' right on the forest that they use for their sustenance. They protest against the development plans of Pruthi's on agricultural land that will affect the simple life of the villagers as well as the ecosphere. At the same time they acknowledge personal freedom where individual is free to make his/her life choices. Abu is a Muslim who is married to a Parsi woman. Ifrat is allowed to live with her boyfriend Tony, which is extremely unconventional for an Indian family, Ifrat's friend Rekha's lesbian relationship with another woman is totally accepted in Shekpali family. Shekpalis are at peace when close to nature. Their pets, dogs and birds are named and treated as individuals who do not consider humans as their

caretakers. In a conversation with a TUCS member Richard, who is knocked down by excited Cottonia (dog), Ifrat tells him:

The power balance is too screwed up in our household for them to know who is really in charge, you see. I mean Cottonia's scared of hens because they bully him. Abba's scared of Amma sometimes, she is scared of him sometimes. I am scared of my paintings sometimes and no one listens to anyone unless they are in the right mood. (153)

This is an ideal situation where humans and non-humans are all living together without a hierarchical power structure. There are times when non-human is preferred over human and there are also times when human is preferred over non-human, depending on the situation. Abu reprimands Arun for smoking near the orchids (25), Abu's jeep is considered occupied when "some misguided bulbuls, relatives of Phalaenopsis have made a nest under the tarpaulin" (48), Abu kills the mad dog who becomes a threat for the human population (32), Abu is in a constant feud with Yeshwant who was found selling timber illegally (9), Ifrat loves animals and at the same time loves eating meat and can even slaughter chickens (42). The novel is based on almost all ecofeminist ideals: Living close to nature, away from technology, considering human and non-human life above everything else, critiquing conservation plans of the government, rejecting religious dogma that creates hierarchies—man above animal and high caste above low caste--, valuing spirituality, and celebrating sexual preferences.

The reason for considering *The Madwoman of Jogare* as a counter example is that the text is too utopian to be presenting reality. Although Shekpalis live in the remote village, their lives are not like those people. They are privileged. Abu Shekpalis is like a 'pioneer-farmer' that early American environmental writings envision and that Pablo Mukherjee criticizes for being too idealistic. Abu is a very influential man who thinks that he owns the entire valley. Ifrat is a

carefree girl who paints as her hobby. They own an apartment in Bombay where Ifrat can go and stay with her boyfriend whenever she wants. This privileged family does not represent the lives of adivasis of the valley or the marginalized members of the society. Hence, when they uphold values that ecofeminism cherishes, all the dismantled dualisms for instance, it sounds impractical, as a common villager cannot afford to do all this because of their material conditions. Ifrat's inability to paint the madwoman is symbolic of the gap between lived experience and looking at somebody else's experience as an outsider.

Defying social and religious constraints vary for the affluent and the poor, the privileged and the underprivileged. Ifrat and her family live in a society but no social and religious rules apply on them. There is no one to judge them, and even if there were, they could not care less because they can afford to be different in the given society. The poor in *Nectar in a Sieve* and the widows in *Water* also defy social and religious conventions but under very different circumstances. Abdulali's dream of a just society based on ecofeminist principles of individual freedom and love of life appear utopian when compared to the societies presented in *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Water*. *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Water* shed light on the true lived experiences of men and women of the given societies. When men and women of these societies disregard the social and religious laws, it is not in an attempt to formulate an ideal society but to survive financially and economically. Women in these two texts do not prostitute because they have a right to use their bodies for pleasure but because this is the only way to fight hunger. There is no one to stand for Gulabi's (the eunuch) human rights in contrast to queer Rekha who finds full support from Ifrat and her family.

Considering the so-called symbolic connection between women and nature because of the reproductive ability of both, Abdulali is very careful in avoiding essentialism that ecofeminists

are criticized for. Instead of connecting only women with nature, she dismantles the binary between man and woman where both are equally capable of showing care and compassion to nature and both are equally dependent on nature. Consequently, embodiment takes an interesting turn in Abdulali's work. As she dismantles the boundaries between male and female, human and nature, the embodiment is also not merely restricted for women and nature. Abdulali seems to cherish bodily realm where she treats nature, including land, trees and animals, and women and men on equal terms. By urinating on the ground, Ifrat leaves "part of herself in the land" (2). Abu Shekpali seeks solace in the trees that his daughter has planted more than he would find pleasure in having grandchildren. For him "humans are not important" as they are a burden on the earth (8). Ifrat sees the land and her lover's body in the same light. "'These are my frontiers,' she thought, 'this field-and-jungle landscape, and the landscape of Tony's body. These are the territories I stalk'" (24). It is important to note here that by refusing to marry Tony, Ifrat denies possession. Her relationship with land as well as Tony is on mutual give and take basis. She cares for nature and the land as she values the ecosphere that is important for life; likewise her sexual relationship with Tony is also reciprocal that she doesn't want to give any name to by marrying. So, Abdulali seems to claim body and bodily realm but she carefully avoids commodification of the bodies as opposed to *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Water* where women's bodies are commodified and treated as land for their instrumental value. Ifrat's sexual relationship with her boyfriend Tony and her refusal to marry him shy away from instrumentalizing bodily experience.

Characters who do instrumentalize the land or women's bodies are clearly labeled wrong for doing so in this text. Arun's obsession with his birthday present, a new green bulldozer, is

reflective of patriarchal treatment of land and women. The measured embodied imagery that Abdulali uses for the land resembles a 'rape' scene.

Earth flew, bleeding mud, earthworms torn in half writhing mindlessly as the green thing grunted and lowered its mouth...Arun laughed as he sat at the controls of his toy...every time the machine heaved itself over another mound, every time it reached in a scooped out another mouthful, silt, clay, grass, stones, bits of zeolite, quartz, agate, snailtracks excavated, snakepaths obliterated, he felt a resonance in his body, an involuntary pleasurable lurch which was sexual in its intensity. He was the conqueror of the world.  
(126-7)

The use of "bleeding" and anthropomorphizing the machine as "heaving" intensify the rape metaphor; this connecting the metaphor of rape for both land and women for most feminists is troubling and contestable as it universalizes women's personal experience of torture (Gudmarsdottir 2006). From an alternative perspective however, it highlights not only women's connectedness with nature but also how feminized imagery of land provides logic of domination of land, similar to men's desire to control women's bodies.

What Abdulali presents is a conceptual framework of Western ecofeminism; what Markandaya and Sidhwa present are actual lived experiences of the women of their respective societies. Abdulali's is a current modern society, societies that Markandaya and Sidhwa present are older regarding the time they are set in. Unfortunately, material reality of most of the women in the Third World has yet not changed much. Abdulali shows oppression of nature and of those who live by it based on the ideological assumption that technology and patriarchal society are the root cause of oppression. She is silent about those instances where the oppressed him/herself perpetrates oppression because it is a tactic to fight other types of acute oppression, as in



*Chemmeen, Nectar in a Sieve, Water, and Village by the Sea.* The stark economic factors are most of the time the root cause of oppression, both of the human and the non-human but Abdulali's text does not provide any such reality. There is only one small incident where one of the minor characters Gopal is found dynamiting the water to catch fish. Abu Shekpali threatens to report him to police where Ifrat interrupts saying: "He was hungry what's he supposed to do?" (77). Abu rejects her concern telling her that he could fish with the net. Before the readers can develop any sympathy for poor Gopal, Abdulali portrays him as a drunk who uses his daughter's school money that government pays for her education to buy alcohol. So clearly, all those who are harming nature are villains as opposed to the heroes like Abu and Ifrat. All the good characters realize their connection with nature and their dependence on it. These two clear cultural distinctions between the categories of humans do not fit in the postcolonial ecofeminist paradigm that finds human characters' ambivalent attitudes toward their environment.

*Nectar in a Sieve* and *Water* portray women-nature connection by showing women's bodies treated as land—for its instrumental value. This connection also highlights inadequacy of mainstream ecofeminism that reads this connection as merely symbolic. It also brings to light the debate about women-land embodiment and the reason this embodiment cannot be rejected because it essentializes women's bodies. Women-land embodiment not only naturalizes women but also feminizes nature that justifies the domination of both on the basis of mind/body dualism. Rejecting women-nature embodiment (that would also mean rejecting women-nature association), on the one hand, would assume that women and nature are only symbolically connected, that would then result in neglecting women's lived experiences where they are actually treated as land, and on the other hand, it would also strengthen human/nature dualism where humans are considered superior to nature, and mind/body dualism where mind is

considered superior to body. The escape route from the domination of both is not rejecting this connection but dismantling the ideological basis that define women and nature as inferior to men, and body as inferior to mind.

## CHAPTER 5. POSTCOLONIAL ECOFEMINIST PEDAGOGY: A SAMPLE

In this chapter I highlight the pedagogical implications of postcolonial ecofeminist theory. Ecofeminist pedagogy is already in practice; a postcolonial perspective however makes it more comprehensive. In the previous chapters I have shown the inadequacy of mainstream ecofeminist theory to cater to the postcolonial settings, the rationale for a postcolonial ecofeminist pedagogy is the same. Ecofeminist pedagogy, since the theory itself is incompatible for postcolonial countries, cannot be used uncritically in the Global South. A postcolonial perspective to the ecofeminist theory can make it a comprehensive pedagogical tool for the postcolonial countries. I show a sample reading of a South-Asian text from postcolonial ecofeminist perspective that can be used in the literature classroom to create awareness about women-nature connectedness. The selected text, Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*, is a typical environmental text<sup>9</sup> that presents nature as a character. All the texts discussed in the previous chapters can be used in a postcolonial ecofeminist pedagogy class but *Fire on the Mountain* may serve as an extreme example of the effects of patriarchal and colonial oppression on women and the environment.

The choice of texts for postcolonial ecofeminist pedagogy is not difficult. Ecofeminism's inherent activism and the rhetorical properties of the environmental texts provide rich context for postcolonial ecofeminist pedagogy. Having evolved from "various fields of feminist inquiry and activism: peace movements, labor movements, women's health movements, and the anti-nuclear, environmental and animal liberation movements" (Gaard, "Living Interconnections" 1), ecofeminism is more a movement than a philosophy. Lawrence Buell, one of the pioneers of

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<sup>9</sup> Buell's definition of the environmental text is given in detail in chapter three of the dissertation.

environmental criticism in his *The Future of Environmental Criticism* provides certain models to the ecocritic to see the relationship between “text and the environment” (45). According to Buell, the job of an ecocritic is not only to see how text mimics the natural environment; on the contrary there are other ways of how a text can be approached. Viewing the “reciprocity between text and environment...as rhetoric” (45) is one of those. Since feminist environmentalists or ecofeminists are desired to be activists, as Greta Gaard asserts: “ideally, the [ecofeminist] theorists must also be activists, thereby enacting the role of ecofeminist praxis” (Gaard, “Living Interconnections” 3), rhetoric holds a special significance for the practitioners of the theory. Ecofeminist theorists and critics can then approach any environmental text rhetorically as rhetoric is not bound to any specific genre; it embraces any mode of expression where the “properties of language and agendas of persuasion meet” (Buell, *The Future* 45).

The embedded activism of ecofeminist theory and the rhetorical properties of environmental texts combine to develop ecofeminism as an analytical tool for a literature classroom. Buell notes in his *The Future of Environmental Criticism* that art and literature in their own “wayward” ways have more power to instruct “than the overtly polemical kind” (vii). Buell in his several works refers to Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) that had an immediate effect on public policy, especially on the initiation of toxic discourse (Buell, *Future* vii; “Toxic Discourse” 645).

Every work of art or literature may not immediately bring about countrywide reform but it can certainly create awareness and consciousness that is required to bring change. Barbara Bennett, a wildlife conservationist, in her *Scheherazade’s Daughters: The Power of Storytelling in Ecofeminist Change* discusses many female authors whose works (fiction and memoirs) have been influential in bringing about a change and creating environmental consciousness in their

readers. She calls these authors Scheherazade's daughters for they are also telling tales to extend the life of the planet just as Scheherazade of "Thousand Nights" tells a story every night to postpone her death.

Postcolonial ecofeminism provides a 'multicultural-transnational stance'<sup>10</sup> to ecofeminism that signals growth in the discourse. The comprehensiveness of the discourse then helps it develop as a pedagogical tool that not only applies to the global north but can also be applied universally. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy in the introduction to their *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation Pedagogy* assert:

Ecofeminism is a practical movement for social change arising out of the struggles of women to sustain themselves, their families, and their communities. These struggles are waged against the "maldevelopment" and environmental degradation caused by patriarchal societies, multinational corporations, and global capitalism... ecofeminism is based not only on the recognition of connection between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women across patriarchal societies. It is also based on the recognition that these two forms of domination are bound up with class exploitation, racism, colonialism, and neocolonialism. (2-3)

Ecofeminism's recognition of interconnectedness of all forms of oppression and its agenda to bring social change through action provides a large array of strategies to the practitioners to choose from according to the context. Jeannie Ludlow, professor of Women's Studies and former abortion care worker, considers ecofeminism to "provide ideal position for teaching

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<sup>10</sup> Serpil Oppermann in her "The Rhizomatic Trajectory of Ecocriticism" considers the growth of ecocritical discourse and its multicultural-transnational stance as its entry to its third wave that incorporates voices from different parts of the world.

earth” (4). In her “Ecofeminism and Experiential Learning: Taking the risks of Activism Seriously,” she reflects on ecofeminist pedagogy classes that involve experiential learning. Her rationale for using ecofeminist pedagogy in her classes is ecofeminism’s status as “multivalent politic comprised of diverse perspectives, encompassing sometimes contradictory methods and goals” (42). For Ludlow, ecofeminism’s concern about patriarchal domination and its effect on the environment, the intersection between gender and the “nature question,” and the ways ecofeminism provides a route to dismantle human/nature divide through activism is helpful for social justice education. Ecofeminist pedagogy’s task of “[exposing] the logic of domination and seek[ing] alternatives that replace this destructive way of relating to each other and nature, ” according to Ludlow makes ecofeminist pedagogy ideal for educators of social justice (Ludlow 44). Ludlow incorporates community based experiential learning in her ecofeminist pedagogy classes that she considers beneficial in three different ways: (1) experiential learning allows students to perform theory and activism together, (2) it empowers the students by enabling them to “translate vague dissatisfactions about ‘the way things are’ into specific issues and targets” (Ludlow 45), (3) community-based experiential learning “benefits the university and the larger community” as it helps the university to fulfill its responsibility of giving back to the community (45). In this context, ecofeminist pedagogy appropriated to combine with experiential learning provides one way of bringing social change.

Karyn Pilgrim and H. Louise Davis develop another ecofeminist pedagogy approach that they term as ‘ecofeminist sustainability pedagogy’ that they define as:

A set of philosophies and strategies that, informed by our political commitments to feminism, environmentalism, and social justice, can be described as an integrative effective form of civic engagement and social activism. (124)

By combining ecofeminism and discourses of sustainability, Pilgrim and Davis assert that as long as the connection between women, non-human, and nature is socially and materially constructed, no sustainability efforts can be effective without knowing the cause of these connections. Considering the rhetoric of women's sustainable choices, Pilgrim and Davis's proposed pedagogy demands that women's material and economic conditions in the given culture should be considered. For most underprivileged and racially marginalized women, "there is no real choice...between water or reproductive freedom, or choosing to be a stay-at-home mom versus having to work to survive, or having no legal, social, or political right to earn a living (127). In such circumstances, women's so-called choices are more often survival strategies but the choices made within the domestic sphere like their reproduction, and management and distribution of the resources affect the entire community and "the very substance of everyday practices...promote[s] or erode[s] the development of sustainability" (128). Women's empowerment that includes giving them "education, bodily sovereignty, access to health care, public voice, political access, choices—to implement sustainable practices" ensures culture change (129). For Pilgrim and Davis, once women-nature connection and oppression is recognized and women and nature are liberated from patriarchal oppression, women's role in sustainability development can be tremendous.

In addition to ecofeminist pedagogy's engagement with sustainability, global meat consumption is another ecofeminist issue that practitioners of ecofeminist pedagogy consider. Lincoln J. Houde and Connie Bullis have developed ecofeminist pedagogy for their communication studies courses "as a way to critique the animal industrial complex and interrupt the hegemonic discursive system that enables and sustains meat-eating" (150). They use popular culture in their classroom as ecofeminist tool to inculcate "critical-relational consciousness" in

their students that helps them question and interrupt the hegemonic discourse that constructs identities (150). Houde and Bullis use *The Simpsons*' episode "Lisa the Vegetarian" using linguistic reflexivity as an analytical tool to discuss the text dialogically that helps to find "counter ideologies and alternatives" (153). Through this exploratory case, Houde and Bullis found that many students who "actively oppose a feminist-vegetarian consciousness despite this interruption, applying linguistic reflexivity dialogics, and a differential and tactical subjectivity provides students with concrete instances of domination and specific alternatives" (167).

Many educators use ecofeminism as a literary analytical tool in the classroom. Barbara Bennett who enjoys teaching literary texts from multiple perspectives uses ecofeminism as one of her analytical tools and considers any perspective valid as long as "the text supports it" (63). Bennett specifically focuses on the overtly ecofeminist texts and finds ecofeminism and literature highly compatible "since ecofeminism proposes to be a way of life more than a theory, literature seems a natural medium for disseminating its ideas and practices (65). In her "Through Ecofeminist Eyes: Le Guin's 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas'," she shares and reflects on her experience of teaching Le Guin's short story to her young adult students. She shares that once the students understand the allegory behind her selected text, initially they are "resistant to questioning that confronts their lifestyle" but later after some "rave[ing] and rant[ing] to find some rationalization for the American lifestyle" (66), Bennett achieves the desired effect when:

Through Le Guin's story, students absorb the idea of interconnectedness—that what happens in one place and to one person affects everyone else, even if we try to ignore the fact. They have learned about the necessity of equality as a major component of a just society, and that one person can make a difference with the choices she or he makes. And



they have seen how the theoretical can be put into practice on a daily level. Philosophy meets literature meets life. (67)

Bennett asserts that such powerful stories have strong influence on the readers' minds and once they understand the message, they can never ignore it. In a literature classroom, ecofeminist perspective can serve not only as a literary analytical tool but may also be used as a "consciousness raising"<sup>11</sup> technique that may involve experiential learning and ecosocial justice activism. The ecofeminist literary analysis can unveil the philosophy behind ecosocial justice that may then prepare the students for the practice, as Sean Blenkinsop and Chris Beeman suggest that an effective ecofeminist pedagogy would involve "deep philosophical work and substantially extended practice" (85). In other words ecofeminist pedagogy, as Lincoln J. Houde and Connie Bullis in their "Ecofeminist Pedagogy: An Exploratory case", interpret is "a critical praxis: a theoretical and practical orientation and approach for bringing political concerns and educational practices together" (150).

Reading a text from an ecofeminist theoretical lens is not like "performing a litmus test to determine the percentage of a text's ecofeminist content; such an approach would be both arrogant and ...anachronistic" (Gaard and Murphy 7). For Gaard and Murphy, an ecofeminist approach to the text involves asking questions<sup>12</sup> that prove the significance of an ecofeminist

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<sup>11</sup> English department of International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan has initiated a 'Consciousness Raising' project that involves students and other members of the society who want to participate. For each session, the project team selects a topic, primarily derived from the themes from the texts that the students encounter in classroom and create awareness among the university students and other members of the society. It may involve posters, workshops, lectures etc. as follow up.

<sup>12</sup> "What previously unnoticed elements of a literary text are made visible, or even foregrounded, when one reads from an ecofeminist perspective? Can this perspective tell literary critics anything new about a text in terms of the traditional elements of style and structure, metaphor and narrative, form and content? How might an ecofeminist perspective enhance explorations of connection and differences among "characters" in a text—between humans and animals, between culture and nature, and across human differences of race, gender, and sexual orientation—connections and differences that affect our relationship with nature and with each other? How could this perspective

analysis. It should bring to light those aspects of the text that are unnoticed by other literary perspectives. It should provide new ways of interpreting the “style and structure, metaphor and narrative, form and content” (7) and new ways of interpreting human and human-nature relationships.

In the following section, I show a sample reading of Anita Desai’s *Fire on the Mountain* from a postcolonial ecofeminist perspective while considering the questions that Gaard and Murphy suggest and based on the understanding from the analysis show possibilities for experiential learning that involves consciousness raising in the community.

*Fire on the Mountain* is Desai’s widely read and discussed novel. A lot of valuable criticism is also available on the text. Like most of her other novels, *Fire* is also seen as Desai’s statement on the existentialist dilemma of her characters. Mrinalini Solanki in her *Anita Desai’s Fiction: Patterns of Survival Strategies* states:

It is generally believed that Desai’s protagonists suffer from a nagging sense of alienation, rootlessness, ungratifying interpersonal relationships, anxiety and despair. In their pursuit for an authentic existence, they seek to withdraw from the world of action and involvement. They feel tormented by a sense of non-belongingness and find isolation inherent in all human relationships. (3-4)

Nanda Kaul and her great-granddaughter Raka in *Fire on the Mountain* are two such characters who are “burdened by their uniqueness” (Solanki 2). In these two, Desai presents an extremely

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be applied to classroom teaching situations? And finally, do we really need to do this? That is, could literary criticism—and its newest development, ecocriticism—get along without an ecofeminist perspective, or does ecofeminist literary criticism have something vital to offer?” (7).

unconventional image of an Indian woman and a child. A conventional Indian woman is expected to be the mistress of the house who is responsible for managing the house, taking care of the family, and being a great hostess. Nanda Kaul's past life is reflective of her conventional role that was enforced upon her. Her current life in Carignano, Kasauli, in isolation, is her retreat from her past life. The news of Raka coming to live with her reminds Nanda of the life full of responsibilities that she had found escape from after her husband's death.

She thought of the veranda of their house...over which she had presided with such an air as to strike awe into visitors...she had sat there, not still and emptily but mending clothes, sewing on strings and buttons and letting out hems, at her feet a small charcoal brazier on which a pot of *kheer* bubbled...Into this din, a tonga had driven up and disgorged flurry of guests...and how everyone had said, 'Isn't she splendid? Isn't she like a queen? ...and her eyes had flashed when she heard, like a pair of black blades, wanting to cut them.

(*Fire* 17-18)

She goes on to remember her sons and daughters and her uncomfortable confinements and how Mr. Kaul had wanted her "always in silk, at the head of the long rosewood table...entertaining his guests" (18). Raka's arrival, for Nanda, after being done with of all these responsibilities, is like "getting that noose-slip once more round her neck that she had thought was freed fully" (19). Nanda's resentment toward her past life is uncharacteristic of a typical South-Asian housewife. However her bitterness has solid reasons that force her to become resentful. She is reacting against the patriarchal oppression that forced her to function in a way that she did not desire.

Nanda's retreat from the household full of responsibilities to the hill station that was once a sanctuary and a safe haven of the colonizers from the Indian way of life is ironic. Jill Didur in her "Guns & Roses: Reading the Picturesque Archive in Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*"

states: “Hill stations were a creation of the British Raj and imagined as Edenic spaces for settlement and escape from the heat of the plains and Indian culture” (499). Nanda finds escape from the family whereas “the hill stations in British colonial culture were seen as ideal places for courtship and family time, ‘a suitable environment for childbirth . . . , matrimony and the burial of kin, the central rites de passage of the colonial community’” (509). Didur in her paper argues that the hill stations and the colonizer’s practice of ‘retreating to the hills’ during the British rule in India is a colonial practice of “appropriation, commodification, and instrumentalization of land and environment” (499). Didur finds Nanda’s “postcolonial retreat” (512) in line with the colonial practice of distancing oneself from those one finds burdened with. Didur relates Nanda’s retreat to the colonial practice and her act of viewing the place to “picturesque gaze”—a dominantly ‘male’ practice. Nanda’s character challenges the idea of women’s care and compassion for life because of their roles as caretakers and household managers. Didur sees her escape from motherly responsibilities imposed by patriarchy as a “masculine distance” (509). Didur justifies her claim by alluding to Nanda’s treatment of the postman where she feminizes him:

Her focus on the postman’s ‘swollen bag’ of mail as he approaches her house ironically inverts their gender roles, and frames the letter he will deliver from her daughter Asha as an unwanted pregnancy, an ‘intrusion and distraction’ from her normally solitary existence in her beloved hilltop property (p. 3). (509)

Didur on the one hand refers to Nanda’s retreat to a colonial practice and on the other hand refers to her escape as “masculine distance” (509). Both of these claims can be countered from ecofeminist perspective. Nanda’s ‘retreat’ from the patriarchal oppression via a practice that itself embodies ‘othering’ and oppression is paradoxical. However, Nanda does not try to

‘appropriate’, ‘commodify’, or use the place for its ‘instrumental value’, as the colonizers did. Kasauli’s environment, a combination of natural beauty, and ‘development’ in the form of Pasteur Institute, roads, and railway lines etc., attracts Nanda more for its bareness as a result of colonial intrusion than its picturesque beauty: “What pleased and satisfied her so, here at Carignano, was its barrenness. This was the chief virtue of all Kasauli of course—its starkness. It had rocks, it had pines. It had light and air. In every direction there was a sweeping view” (*Fire* 4). Nanda never tries to change the place: “Unlike any other owner of house and garden, she had not said: Here I will plant a willow, there I will pull out the Spanish broom and put in pampas grass instead” (31). Nanda identifies herself with the place. Once occupied by the colonizers, they appreciated its beauty and at the same time appropriated it to suit their interests. Now the place stands on its own telling the tale of oppression at the hands of colonizers. It is this current state of the place, especially Nanda’s house that she feels at home the most: “It seemed so exactly right as a house for her, it satisfied her heart completely. How could it ever have belonged to anyone else? What could it possibly have been like before Nanda Kaul came to it? She could not imagine” (5). Having escaped from her past life, and leaving behind the burden of responsibilities imposed by patriarchy, Nanda thinks she is just like Carignano—misused once but free now. She is however wrong about her freedom and that of the place too. Raka comes to live with her following her as a responsibility that she thought she had escaped from. Her illusion about Kasauli as a sanctuary that has been left alone by the oppressors also proved wrong when Ila Das, her friend gets raped and strangled to death during her visit to Kasauli. Nanda wants to escape the patriarchal oppression in the form of unwanted duties and she wants the place too to be left alone by human intrusion in the form of imperialistic developmental plans.

Treating Nanda's escape from the responsibilities as "masculine distance" is also problematic. It essentializes men and women as masculine and feminine, as if denouncing her responsibilities would make her less of a woman. The relationship that Nanda has with the place and its environment is unconventional but denouncing it as 'colonial' or 'masculine' undermines the complexity of her character. Her character challenges the romanticized notion of women-nature connectedness where 'care' and 'compassion' are considered essential feminine characteristics. Nanda does identify herself with nature and she does live in a biomorphic unity with it but the aspect of nature that she finds solace in is not the typical beautiful imagery of nature. On several occasions she identifies herself as a tree or an animal:

She fancied she would merge with the pine trees and be mistaken for one, to be a tree, no more and no less, was all she was prepared to undertake.

She would be a charred tree trunk in the forest, a broken pillar of marble in the desert, a lizard on a stone wall. (23)

Herself a grey cat, a night prowler... (26)

The unconventional character of Nanda along with her unusual connection and relationship with nature highlights one specific aspect of women-nature connection. Women, like nature (and like men) also have the ability to be wild; however like nature, they are also tamed and domesticated by the patriarchal society. Nanda's tale that she tells Raka about her father's private zoo where he kept wild animals in a cage is symbolic of Nanda's own life encaged by the responsibilities that she does not want to take. She finds no pleasure in motherhood and in being the mistress of the house. It is in Carignano, Kasauli that she finds her freedom. "She reveled in its barrenness and emptiness. The loose pebbles of the gravel pleased her as much as rich turf might another. She cared not to add another tree to the group of apricots by the veranda or the group of three

pinetrees at the gate” (31). Nanda’s lack of interest in the garden and the birds around not only reflects her abhorrence for responsibility but also reflects her interest in the things as they are. She does not want to be a caretaker or a steward of the garden, but allows it to grow as it is. Her identification with nature (wishing to be like a tree trunk for example) and allowing the garden to grow as it is symbolizes her desire to be freed of domestication in the form of duties. She also wants to be like those plants and trees that grow on their own without any human interference.

Like Nanda Kaul, her great granddaughter Raka is also a unique character. Before Raka’s arrival, Nanda imagines her as “no more than a particularly dark and irksome spot on the hazy landscape—a mosquito, a cricket, or a grain of sand in the eye” (35). It is through Raka that the readers can see the true face of the place. Immediately after her arrival, she starts observing things that the readers cannot see through Nanda’s gaze. She is quick to find the “club that her grandmother had spoken of, but deserted now, asleep” (43). She also sees Pasteur Institute that she initially mistakes for a factory that “dominate[d] the landscape – a square dragon, boxed, bricked and stoked” (42). When she questions Ram Lal, the cook about the ‘factory’, he tells her that the “doctors make serums for injections” there (44):

When a man is bitten by a mad dog, he is taken there for injections – fourteen, in the stomach. I’ve had them myself. Once a whole village was rounded up and taken there – a dog had gone mad and bitten everyone in the village. The dog had to be killed. Its head was cut off and sent to the Institute. The doctors cut them open and look into them. They have rabbits and guinea pigs there, too, many animals. They use them for tests. (44)

Raka’s small adventures enable her to see those aspects of the place that neither she was told by her grandmother, nor are the readers told through Nanda’s perspective. It is because of this contrast between how Nanda sees the place and how Raka views it that Didur finds Nanda and

Raka's gaze contrasting. She finds Nanda's gaze as picturesque while Raka's as anti-picturesque: "Raka's recurring disturbing encounters with the presence of the Pasteur Institute throughout her time in Kasauli prevent her from aligning her view of Kasauli with her great grandmother's picturesque gaze" (515). Considering Nanda's interest in and her identification with the barrenness of the place however tells a different tale. She in fact does not find Raka opposite of her: "Nanda saw that she [Raka] was the finished, perfected model of what Nanda Kaul herself was merely a brave, flawed experiment" (47). Raka is what Nanda aspires to be. Nanda has only been able to see the effects of colonization/patriarchy on herself and the environment while Raka observes the causes too. Nanda's identification with the place reflects her desire to be freed of patriarchy that fails her; Raka's very presence at Carignano is the proof of Nanda's failure. The way Nanda cannot escape responsibilities imposed by patriarchy; Kasauli is also still haunted by colonization in the form of 'development' that Raka explores. Through characters like Nanda and Raka, and the places like Kasauli, Desai presents the effects of patriarchy and colonization on the human and the non-human. Both the characters and the place, the way they are presented, are not what traditionally an Indian woman and a child, and a hill-station are. On the contrary, they are presented as affectees of patriarchy and colonization.

Just as Didur sees Nanda in 'colonial' and 'masculine' terms, K. J. Phillips in "Ambiguous Tragic Flaw in Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*" sees Nanda as Aristotle's tragic hero and *Fire on the Mountain* as "a perfect tragedy in the Greek mode" (3). According to Phillips, Nanda, like Aristotelian tragic hero of noble birth, who after fulfilling her responsibilities, retreats to a sanctuary. The eventual tragedies—Raka setting the mountain on fire, and Ila Das being raped and murdered—are the result of Nanda's 'flaw' for she "may recognize that she herself has contributed to Raka's anarchy, by not reaching out to her sooner.



Moreover, she has contributed to Ila's murder, by refusing to offer Ila a place to stay" (3). Like a typical tragic hero, "Nanda is somehow responsible for all the violence, although she has intended only peace for herself—a reversal exactly in Aristotle's terms" (3). Phillips provides three interpretations for the violence that occurs in the novel—firstly, Nanda by refusing to continue her feminine duties can be the cause of violence; secondly, the story is a tragedy of Nanda herself who despite wanting to be left alone without any worldly responsibilities starts feeling for Raka and her emotions eventually bring pain; thirdly, the society punishes all the three women—Nanda, Raka, and Ila—for being unconventional. Phillip asserts that Desai, ambivalently shifting between these three views, saves Nanda from total blame by portraying her as a victim too who seeks refuge and affection so “tragedy occurs not primarily because of prideful solitude or because of an inescapable nature of things...Instead, disaster results from society's flaws, which could be changed” (8). Phillips insight on the text and the three interpretations are compelling as the text supports all these views. Nanda’s and Raka’s actions that bring tragedy and violence are not the essential features of their personalities but reactions to what has been done to them. However, it is also important to note that Nanda’s “prideful solitude” (Phillip 8) is a façade and there are clear hints in the texts. Didur also seems to assert that Nanda’s retreat to Kasauli was a choice when she refers to it as masculine distance’ and ‘postcolonial retreat’ but there is evidence in the text against it. Once when Nanda hears the news of Ila’s rape and murder, in extreme agony, she makes several confessions and one of those is: “she did not live here alone by choice, she lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do, reduced to doing” (145). The reason Nanda believes she is happy at Carignano is that right before being transported to Carignano, she realizes that “the care of others was a habit that [she] had mislaid. It had been a religious calling she had believed in till she found it fake. It

had been a vocation that one day went dull and drought-struck as though its life spring had dried up” (30). After her husband’s death, her sons and daughters came to distribute the belongings among themselves and escort her to Kasauli. She had no option left. With her husband departed who had never loved her and children whom she had brought up “to be busy and responsible,” (31) she had to live alone. What Phillips and Didur seem to assert is that Nanda’s retreat to the hill station is a choice she made but the textual evidence proves that although she was never satisfied by her past life, she was forced by her circumstances to don a character that paints her in a negative light.

Desai seems to deconstruct the binaries within humans, and within nonhuman nature through the character of Nanda and Raka, and through the description of non-human nature. By depicting the two as unconventional characters, Desai presents them as human characters who have the capacity to be what society does not approve of. Nanda does what a conventional Indian woman is never expected to do—leave her house full of responsibilities. Paul Sharrad in his “Desirable or Dysfunctional? Family in Recent Indian English-Language Fiction” discusses the “major shift in outlook” in the Indian fiction where certain norms regarding a family and family life are dismantled (123). Conservative critics see this trend as “symptomatic of the decline in morality, loss of nationalist ideals enshrined in Gandhi’s principles of selfless service, godless Western influence” (124). Sharrad also see this shift as a modernizing trend where family is no longer the center (125). Raka too, a young female child is unlike a conventional child.

This hill, with its one destroyed house and one unbuilt one... The scene of devastation and failure somehow drew her, inspired her. Not so the nurseries and bedrooms of her infancy...Not so the clubs and parks of the cities in which she had lived but to which no one had given her the necessary pass...Carignano had much to offer...it was the best of

places she'd lived in ever...It was the ravaged, destroyed, and barren spaces in Kasauli that drew her. (90-91)

Raka, a fragile little girl, who had just recovered from her illness, is brought up in an environment of domestic abuse. What Nanda Kaul suffered most of the time was mental torture but Raka has seen her mother being physically abused. Just as Nanda is disillusioned with a conjugal family life, so is Raka. Both Nanda and Raka identify with the dilapidated because for them this has always been the reality. When Nanda hears the news of Ila's rape and death she faces the ugliness and the harsh reality once again that she thought she has left behind. The news strikes her like a lightning bolt that jolts her back to reality:

She had lied to Raka, lied about everything...they had not had bears and leopard in their home, nothing but overfed dogs and bad-tempered parrots. Nor had her husband loved and cherished her and kept her like a queen—he had only done enough to keep her quiet while he carried on a lifelong affair with Miss David... And her children—the children were all alien to her nature. She neither understood nor loved them. She did not live here alone by choice. She lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do, reduced to doing. (145)

Nanda's realization that she had told fabricated stories to Raka to have something interesting to tell her, her confession about never understanding or loving her children and being forced to leave her house and live in Kasauli, and Raka's setting the mountain on fire are parallel. Both have suffered and reacted in their own way. Nanda's reaction was mild. She could not even cry out loud but Raka's was extreme. Both the characters have been 'smoldering' and it is only Raka who eventually lets it out. Their actions—mild in Nanda's case, and extreme in Raka's case—are examples of violence that they commit by being forced by their circumstances.

Desai does not necessarily portray them as ‘bad’ characters as the detailed context that she provides for their actions justifies them. Nanda’s lack of interest in her responsibilities is justified by the patriarchal oppression that she has been through almost all her life. Raka’s setting the mountain on fire is an outlet to her anger for her oppressed childhood, and an attempt to destroy, once and for all, which was gradually rotting away by the ‘maldevelopment’ of the place by the colonizers.

Just as Desai has shown women’s and children’s capacity for violence as a reaction, she depicts non-human nature too in its not-so-romantic form. Desai in this text has a unique way of portraying human-nature relationship. This text does not portray women and children among beautiful natural imagery. Major characters are not portrayed as those ‘wounding’ the mother earth or getting their wounds healed by the balm of the natural environment. On the contrary, they are just there as part of the biosphere that also includes those aspects of nature that are not always beautiful. The imagery of jackals chewing the bones of mad dogs and then biting the dogs that would then bite the humans is just one such example from the text (44). This apparently ‘ugly’ aspect of human and non-human nature not only helps to dismantle the binaries within nature, but also helps to see how colonization and patriarchy may trigger violence that brings out the ‘ugly’ in nature, human and non-human.

Without overt ecofeminist theoretical underpinnings, the analysis of the text has foregrounded certain elements that other critiques of the texts overlook. The most important aspect that the analysis brings to light is that a patriarchal society treats women and the environment alike where both are used for their instrumental value—women for fulfilling their responsibilities as wives and mothers, and the environment is appropriated to suit the needs of the patriarchs. Nanda spends most of her life fulfilling the responsibilities of a wife and a mother.

Her act of going to live in Carignano is not shunning her responsibilities, in fact she has lost her function of a wife with her husband's death, and that of a mother too with her children all married and settled. It is after her departure from the Chancellor's house when she realizes that all the sacrifices that she made as a wife and mother were the 'uses' she was put to. With her husband dead and her children with their own families and jobs, her 'services' are not required anymore. Her presence at Kasauli and her apparent satisfaction with the 'barrenness' of the place are symbolic, as her identification with the place reflects how colonization and patriarchy affect women and the environment in the same way. The way colonizers used the place for its instrumental value, so did Nanda's family use her, for her wifely and motherly duties.

Discussion of this text from postcolonial ecofeminist perspective in the classroom would be step one of the process that would lead to step two: experiential learning for 'consciousness raising' in the community. Prior understanding of some basic feminist and ecofeminist discourse is helpful to carry on the discussion. The discussion, as presented above, may create critical thinking in the students about issues that they have always perceived differently. For example, a South-Asian woman living away in a hill-station all by herself apparently gives an impression of an arrogant woman who is self-centered and selfish. The reason for this understanding about her character is the apparent clash with a desired cultural image of an Indian woman. Similarly, a child character like Raka is usually perceived as an abnormal child who needs medication to get well. The discussion of the text also brings to light the parallel treatment of women and the environment. It is through Nanda and Raka that the environmental degradation resulting from imperial developmental plans is exposed. In the modern age, development cannot always be regarded as 'bad' but the students need to develop this critical understanding that there are pros and cons of developmental plans and every plan is not always comparatively more beneficial.

Pasteur Institute, for instance, is made to create vaccines that the people throughout the country need but the way vaccines are made and tested on animals is a far greater price to pay than the supposed benefit it may provide. Harmful effects of Pasteur Institute on the non-human life and the environment in general are the result of imperial environmental oppression in the form of ‘development.’

The critical insight into the above mentioned issues then may prepare the students to create consciousness in the community about what they have learned from the discussion. The assignments and activities may involve making posters, small group discussions, workshops, and one-on-one conversations. The students may be asked to divide the textual discussion outcomes into themes and issues and the small groups can be assigned one theme/issue each. Deciding the target audience can be the part of the assignment where students determine who needs the kind of information they want to disseminate. University campuses, community centers, libraries, reading halls etc. may be considerable venues to involve community members for consciousness raising. A proposal for each project from the students explaining the project, the target audience, venue, and the expected outcomes can be helpful before carrying out the project.

Such activities where students have a variety of options to choose from, and members of the community are involved, measuring their success is not easy. However in the institutes where critical thinking forums and reading clubs are initiated by English departments to do small consciousness raising projects, students’ involvement in any relevant activity should be enough to grade the activity. A mandatory, self-evaluating report by the student at the end of the project may be helpful in evaluating the activity.

A postcolonial ecofeminist pedagogical approach in a literature classroom that incorporates experiential learning can serve several purposes. It provides a new analytical tool to

the learners to approach the text. It also takes theory to praxis where the rhetorical appeal of the text is taken seriously. It enables the students to spread the consciousness outside the classroom that helps them become responsible members of the society. Finally, postcolonial ecofeminist pedagogy, because of its wide spectrum, can be used worldwide without being labeled as Western.

## CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

I have often seen protestors beating their own chests; I have also seen individuals publicly burning themselves as a protest; citizens vandalizing the public and private properties as protest against the corrupt authorities is not unheard of and unseen either. Beating the chests, suicide, and vandalizing the property are harmful more for the protestors themselves and at times even the cause they stand for than those protested against. Yet this happens always because for the oppressed, this is perhaps the only immediate way to assert their existence and record the protest against the oppressor. For the colonized, as the ‘post’ of the post-colonialism does not refer to the end of colonization<sup>13</sup>, the resistance is violent. This violent resistance is not the essential character of the oppressed; it is the reaction. The circumstances force the oppressed to don a new character as it ensures the survival of the oppressed as an attempt to ward off total annihilation.

Violent resistance of the oppressed individuals and societies is represented in the literary texts that are under analysis in this study. Through the textual analysis I have shown how various characters from the chosen texts, male and female, are involved in violence, from mild to extreme, in their relationship with the environment and fellow human beings. I have seen this interaction from a postcolonial ecofeminist perspective that on the one hand challenges mainstream ecofeminism on its assumption of women’s relationship of care and compassion toward nature because of their socialization as caretakers and nurturers, and on the other hand rests in ecofeminist assumption of the association of women and nature and the feminized and naturalized status of the colonized, the weak members of the society (children and the elderly),

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<sup>13</sup> See Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*.



and the underclass. Consequently, the study demands an expansion in the ecofeminist discourse that makes room for a postcolonial perspective. Where mainstream ecofeminism considers environmental oppression on the part of human, male and female agents, resulting from an internalized patriarchal ideology that sanctions the oppression of women and nature; postcolonial ecofeminism demands that the material conditions of the (post)colonized men and women also be considered that adds another layer to the causes of environmental oppression. It asserts that the internalized patriarchal ideology is not the only cause of twin domination of women and nature; the politically constructed environments force women and men of the Third World communities to indulge in practices that oppress the natural environment they inhabit, as survival strategies. More than any ideology, it is the need to survive that determines the relationship of the characters to their natural environment. The study also contributes in another significant debate in mainstream ecofeminist discourse: women-nature embodiment. Most mainstream ecofeminists and feminists reject the idea of women-nature embodiment as essentialist. The study however brings to light the significance of women-nature embodiment in the postcolonial ecofeminist discourse where reclaiming body and bodily realm is essential to combat violence against women and nature.

The study was carried out on the assumption that mainstream ecofeminist discourse is typically Western and reading it against the South-Asian settings yields contradictory results. I chose South-Asian fiction as my texts to test my assumption and raised three questions:

1. What is the role of South-Asian authors, male and female, in depicting women-nature relationship? Does this depiction clash with the Western ecofeminist assumptions about women-nature relationship?

2. In the selected primary texts, how can South-Asian women characters' apparent lack of compassion toward environment be understood in ecofeminist perspective?
3. The embodiment of women and nature (women as naturalized—cows, bitches—and nature as feminized—virgin land, barren soil etc.) is identified as 'symbolic connections' between women and nature. Is the portrayal of women-nature embodiment in the selected South-Asian fiction symbolic?

Question one was raised and answered in chapter two where I discussed four authors and one representative text by each author to show how the depiction of women-nature relationship by these authors is unlike a typical women-nature relationship in the main stream ecofeminist discourse. Women are considered to have an attitude of care and compassion toward nature because of their socialization as mothers, nurturers and caretakers. The discussed authors however portrayed female characters, who do not necessarily show compassion toward nature or life in general; on the contrary these characters are ambivalent regarding their relationship with their environment. The best way to understand and explain this ambivalence is considering their material conditions. By depicting such characters, the authors have contributed in developing a postcolonial ecofeminist perspective that is more appropriate for the South-Asian settings as compared to the Western brand of ecofeminism.

Chapter three addresses question two, highlighting how the actual practices and choices of female characters living in the natural environment may yield contradictory results if seen from mainstream ecofeminist perspective. The chapter introduces an alternative perspective that requires that the practices and choices of the characters be seen considering their material reality. If the practices are analyzed from mainstream ecofeminist perspective, the only explanation to the apparently harmful practices of the characters is that they have internalized patriarchal

ideology that considers women and nature inferior hence available for exploitation. The alternative analysis demands that each character's material conditions should be considered before explaining their relationship with their natural environment. In the analysis when each character's choices and practices are seen accordingly, it is found that their relationship with their environment is ambivalent, not necessarily that of care and compassion. The analyses of the texts also revealed that in the given societies there is no essential difference in men and women's attitude toward nature. There is ambivalence in each character's relationship with nature but that ambivalence is most of the times caused by the circumstances and material conditions in which the characters live. Most of the characters from the selected texts live in close proximity with nature as fishers or farmers and are in a direct contact with nature that allows them to develop a relationship with nature. This observation supports the stance of many ecofeminists who claim that men are not essentially devoid of showing care toward nature; they are just socialized in a different way. In the societies, as presented in the selected texts, where men are also socialized to be caretakers, they also show the capacity to be concerned for nature.

The question of women-nature embodiment is discussed in chapter four. This connection is considered symbolic as it rests on the idea that since women and nature are alike and women have bodies so has nature. Feminists and even many ecofeminists contest this assertion as it essentializes women and furthers the oppression by treating women as mere bodies that can be reified. The examples from the chosen texts however show that women-nature connection is not only symbolic in many societies. Women's bodies are actually treated as land where they are used for sustenance in form of prostitution. Rejecting women-nature embodiment will not solve the actual material reality of such women. Their bodies are used to 'reproduce' children and are also 'leased out' in exchange of food and money, just like land. Similarly, land is also treated as

a woman's body. Reclaiming the bodily realm will highlight the oppression that women and land undergo at the hands of patriarchy. It will also help shatter the human/nature and mind/body dualism and provide an escape route from the twin domination.

Mainstream ecofeminism and postcolonial ecofeminism are not mutually exclusive as postcolonial ecofeminism adds to the layers of ecofeminism. Both might appear contradictory at times since one believes in women as a unified category and the other suggests a provincialized perspective that distinguishes between the women of the First World and the Third World and even within these broader zones based on their material reality. One considers patriarchal ideology as the only cause of twin domination of women and nature and the other considers other factors too besides patriarchal ideology. This difference however does not shake the fundamental ecofeminist methodology that “analyzes the interconnection of the oppression of women and nature” (Bressler 236). Postcolonial ecofeminism then can be one type among many other types of ecofeminism like cultural ecofeminism and social and socialist ecofeminism<sup>14</sup>. This may result in some self-contradictory strands in ecofeminism that some ecofeminists celebrate as the diversity of the field while some discredit it as “theoretical inconsistency” (Gaard “Living Interconnections” 6).

Despite all the inconsistencies and contradictions within various strands of ecofeminism, it cannot be rejected as irrelevant. Rejecting ecofeminism altogether would mean rejecting woman-nature connection that also implies the inferiorized, feminized, and naturalized status of

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<sup>14</sup> Carolyn Merchant in her *Radical Ecology: Search for a Livable World* defines cultural ecofeminism as type of ecofeminism that considers patriarchy as the cause of environmental degradation. Feminists label it as essentialist for its belief in spirituality and women-nature connectedness. Social and socialist ecofeminism ground their methodology in critiquing capitalist patriarchy that deems production superior than reproduction that then strengthens the culture/nature and man/woman binaries.

the weak members of the society that includes children, the elderly, the underclass and, the people of color. Relating all the weak with women and nature groups them together as 'others' who are out of the 'human model' that only includes the 'elite male'. In order to shatter this human/other dualism, it is important to consider all forms of oppression as connected and the liberation of one or the other alone is not the solution of the problem.

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