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NEGOTIATING FEMININITY WITH MASCULINITY IN WATER CRISIS: AN ECOFEMINIST PERUSAL OF SARAH JOSEPH'S *GIFT IN GREEN*

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ABSTRACT

Water (Nature) has a music of life, nurturing and comforting the worldly races without expecting any return and returns. It nourishes us by practicing so called feminine qualities of love, care, delicacy, patience etc. These qualities, actually, are estimable for those who esteem the Mother earth celebrating the nurturing lap and embracing the wildly mild offspring of her. These people are, theoretically called Ecofeminist who essay to comprehend nature through women and vice-versa. Ecofeminism argues that there are important connections between the domination and oppression of women and domination and exploitation of nature by masculine methods and attitudes.

This paper, in fact, proposes to trace the feminine traits either in male or female which are being exercised in the preservation and promotion of water (nature) in the novel *Gift in Green* by Sarah Joseph. The female characters like Kunjimathu, Gitanjali, Shailaja and some other weight the soothing sound of water in daily life whereas some male personas like Dinakaran, Noor Muhammad, Chandramohan etc, by allowing their feminine traits, attempt to save water by circulating stories that are related to the significance of water among the people of Aathi. The novel showcased the significance of natural gifts specially water in the human and non-human world where life is composed because water is there. But these gifts can only be celebrated by practicing feminine qualities.

Key Words : Ecofeminism, Femininity, Masculinity, Water, Religion, Reductionist science, Cognitive colonialism etc

“Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop
But there is no water”. (*The Waste Land*).

These two lines of Eliot exhibiting the future lethal-film of human and non-human world where the water-sound might serve the fundamental need of the water, are, in fact, indicating the masculine blindness to water. Water may live better without us but we without water, might survive for four days. It is the most significant form of nutriment in life. Surprisingly, our treatment towards water, as an inexhaustible perennial flow has brought us in such

a stage where only around 3% of potable water available out of waters (sea), we've. The aridity of India is a masculine rather than a natural disaster. The manufacturing of deforestation and desertification for feeding the cash crops is, actually, a consequence of reductionist science. The dominant models of development are violating cycles of life in river, in soil and in mountain. States like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand etc are facing new water-

scarcities brought by mal-development and capital accumulation. Water-scarcity leads to violence and disruption in town. In some places mentioned above, water is sold and purchased for life. It is protected and supplied under the police-protection, under lock and key. Divya, sister of Dinakaran in *Gift in Green*, lives in Mumbai. She is compelled to drink the heavily chlorinated water brought in tankers and supplied once a week. Even the tea made with it makes you nauseous. This water, harmful for body causes several diseases like diarrhea, vomiting, etc. She complains:

I have washed away the dirt of a whole year...water is not good to drink or even to bathe with...Drinking water had to be bought. Those who could not afford to buy safe water used the tanker water for drinking and cooking. Every now and then an epidemic of vomiting and diarrhea broke out and lingered as tough reluctant to leave. Achhu (her son) has got the infection once. It nearly killed him. (30-31).

This paper, apart from focusing on the so-called virilient drives including 'parens patriae' (patriarchal parent), reductionist science, mal-development, desertification, deforestation, commercial interest, over-exploitation, marketing and cashing the natural resources etc, also proposes to underline certain basic questions related to essential need of natural resources focusing on water. The questions like- 'Has the mind of a human being emptied of everything? , Without Nature how can one survive? , Where should our torch of priority focus, on freedom or on need? - still seek responses from the human-world. False ideology of development, in truth, nurses the political aspect of it where it determines political leaning, framing priorities, setting cash-agendas and justifying cash-policies as welfare-policies. It can never be the social aspect of development rather, is a political propaganda. In *Gift in Green*, Kumaran, a typical-agent of political development, questions the identity of the water as he despises it, "Water-life...the thing had no form and shape. In pot, it resembles a pot...what is this water you're talking about? Does it have any identity? Will it ever be something in itself? The thought of it makes me

sick" (21). He schedules the progress of Aathi by planning his departure from there. But Kunjimathu, his beloved, prioritizing her small world of water, land, rice fish, paddy, lake, marshes and family, refuses to leave Aathi because she knows one thing for sure; "Water knows everything and forgets nothing"(21).

Capital accumulation (another masculinist stance) with a spurious assumption that the recovery of ecological exuberance and balance can merely be done by taking plantation in command, is, literally, a colonial legacy reinforcing the unilinear agenda of cashing the land. This attitude destroying the women's knowledge and productivity which are ultimate sources of sustenance, violates the natural flow of life. Kumaran submerging the catchments; landfilling the marshy land and the paddy fields and diverging the surface water of Aathi, sets up an industrial township under the pretext of generating 50,000 jobs at the investment of Rs 10,000 corer. He, blind to the riparian right of the innocent people of Aathi, deprives them of water. Dinakaran underlines these typical-masculinist blind desires which cheat everyone, "We will cheat the land, cheat the water, and cheat the sun and the moon. Cheat even the woman we marry and the children we beget" (205). As a matter of fact, the novel evidences these cheatings with women as Kunjimathu has been cheated by Kumaran and left as a void woman without marrying; Gitanjali and Hagar have also been brought in the same boat of masculine falsity and underhandedness. Here, one thing is quite common in these women that they after being deceived by their husbands and partners tend to the soothing and consoling lap of Nature.

The Reductionist science, introducing patriarchal-development, is another masculinist attitude which determines the paradigms of scientific agriculture, scientific animal husbandry, and scientific water management and so on. It cashes the dispensability of Nature and women for the sake of the middle class, European, male entrepreneur through, what Vandana Shiva has underlined- "the conjunction of human knowledge and power in science" (*Staying Alive* p16). Koman Joy (*Gift in Green*), spraying pesticides mixing with quicklime, DDT and other insecticide powders

attempts to grab the paddy fields of Kunjimathu and makes it infertile. These pesticides were scheduled to eradicate prawns, oysters, fish and mushrooms from Aathi so that the people would be compelled to leave Aathi by selling their lands to Kumaran. This science of development witnesses the collapse of the yellow butterflies and the prawns in thousands on water-surface. A fisherman notices:

The massacre of fish having now become a routine practice, many varieties of fish have become extinct. We demand that those who take our paddy field on lease should refrain from the despicable practice of killing every fish and sinking every fisherman into grinding poverty under the guise of 'irradiation' (177).

Kumaran limiting the flow of water by erecting the granite embankment ensures the havoc of epidemics for the peasantry of Aathi. The flow-less water starts stagnating, accumulating and decomposing whatever comes in it. It attracts disease breeding flies and mosquitoes droned with a vengeance. This act by breeding fatal diseases, also witnesses the death of nineteen innocent children of typhoid in Aathi. Kunjimathu as a protest sits in waist-deep water in order to make people aware of the hidden and political agendas of Kumaran. Shailaja by pouring petrol on herself, threatens the police to kill herself in order to save Dinakaran and other people of Aathi. She plays an important role in stopping the landfilling, at least for some days. Grace Chali (lady-advocate) challenges Kumaran in the court for the flow of water and survival of Aathi. These women react against the patriarchal project of domination and destruction.

Cognitive Colonialism under colonial legacy essays to engineer the society for profit under the guise of development. The idealism, what Jan Nederveen Pieterse noticed "where the advanced societies are supposed to be the mirror and guide for less-developed societies" is, actually, set for the capital accumulation under the knowledge and hegemony of production. Religious threat and techno-mechanical temptation are also included in the masculine attitudes as they try to establish and re-establish the truth of their choices. The gun threatens the people of Aathi because they've never

seen even the glimpse of it. In fact, they have never been in need of it. Kumaran under the guise of religious development has replaced the natural sight of the shrine Thampuram by cladding it with gold. A priest, for the first time in Aathi, is introduced, "clad in white and carrying his gods in a bag" (107). He proposes the building of a new shrine by following the principles of Vastu, replacing the old Thampuram where deity is Darkness. The priest says:

The people here, alas, are ignorant of Vastu. So we need to bring an expert from elsewhere. Thrusting his bag at the people, the priest said, "Here are the alternatives to your darkness. Pick the deity of your choice...alternative to darkness? Did he mean alternative to Thampuram? (109).

This paper also suggests the crucial play of femininity which assimilates the nurturing principles of care with delicacy; love with mild touch; patience with soft treatment etc, is as the only wildly-accepted attitude towards the recovery and regeneration of Nature. History of masculinist hegemony based on reductionist economics substantiates disappearing of the water-sources which has meant new worry and tedium for women. The drying up of each river or well forces women to cover a long distance on foot in search of new water-source because they're water-providers in the family. The novel, *Gift in Green* evidences Hagar's long-run for water with her infant son, Ishmail, whose lips are drying to death due to lack of even a drop of water. She experiences the miracle of breasts turning into milk which otherwise were dry, after soaking herself in the stream. She as a caretaker understands the thirst of people, the infinite significance of water and a secret of life scripted into it. She asserts:

I shall be the caretaker of this water, guard it and mother it for the sake of my child and for the sake of the children yet to be born. This water you shall have but, but only if you agree to a covenant. I insists on this not in a spirit of power or of ownership, but in the name of life. I know the value of water. To me, the value of the first drop is the value of the life of my firstborn (14).

Water (Nature) has the music of life, nurturing and comforting the worldly races without expecting any return and returns. Sarah Joseph, in *Gift in Green* values water as life-giver-“The Giver of life will water give; For God is life and life, water”. This music of life is sonorous for those who esteem the Mother earth celebrating the nurturing lap and embracing the wildly mild offspring of her. These people are, theoretically called Ecofeminist who essay to comprehend nature through women and vice-versa. Ecofeminism argues that there are important connections between the domination and oppression of women and domination and exploitation of nature by masculine methods and attitudes.

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The advocating of feminine traits can only save the water/life on the earth. The conventional feminine labour in agriculture has been in a life-giving partnership with Nature which is a substitute for the chemical-crop, masculinist science and industry. We, as Dinakaran examines, need to understand the water as lotus knows it; as a river flows it; as a well reserves it and as a woman mothers it. Vandana Shiva by quoting D.Worster proposes to act ecologically and “to think like a river and to flow with the nature of water” (Thinking Like

a Water, p 57). We have to take into account that Nature conceives not just timber and revenue but also produces water, soil, land, tree etc. The feminine agriculture and development prioritize need over freedom; advocate Earth-democracy; justify the science which is scheduled for Nature; inspire the collective farming; promote the polyculture (diversity) in agriculture; use and produce what we need of Nature and so on. The revival of feminine principles in the society will determine the recovery of the water-cycle which is still being violated; else, the day is so close when the sound of water might quench the thirst for water, what S.T. Coleridge in his poem “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” has said:

Water, water everywhere
All the boards did shrink
Water, water everywhere
Nor, any drop to drink.

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