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ECOFEMINISM IN SARAH JOSEPH'S *GIFT IN GREEN*

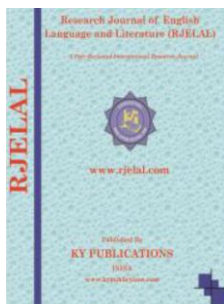
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ABSTRACT

Ecofeminism deals with the two venerable and suppressed things in the world that are Woman and Environment. Though it seems a novel theory, it has age old references from ancient world as woman and nature often compared in literary text almost all around the world. Thus emerges the concept called Ecofeminism and becomes a significant part of study in the field of literature. It aids people to protect/respect both woman and nature as the world demands it. This literary study, not like other aesthetic one which gives only pleasure and peace, predominantly provides awareness to the imperfect world about the chaotic situation of the present and instruct people to act wisely as not to hurt woman and nature. Sarah Joesph, a novelist and short story writer, hails from Kerala. She always gives voice for woman and nature against patriarchal society. Her novel *Gift in Green* delineates the impact of both Cultural feminism and Radical feminism.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Ecocriticism, Radical Ecofeminism, Cultural Ecofeminism, Patriarchal society, Nature.

Ecological feminism which is known as Ecofeminism is a major classification of feminism as it studies the kinship between woman and environment. Francoise d'Eaubonne, a French feminist, coined the term 'Ecofeminism' which reiterates that both woman and nature are devastated by the patriarchal society. Ecofeminists formerly struggle against the desolation of nature and furnish awareness about inequitable state of woman and nature due to the dominance of male-centered society. They vehemently attack the male-chauvinist society as it treats both nature and woman as objects. Besides the exploitation of nature and gender discrimination, it also deals with

the spiritual connection between woman and nature.

Ecofeminists appeal for both environmentally and ethically good society that respects nature and woman. The modern ecofeminists try their hand at conjoining environmentalists and feminists under one umbrella to avert the plight in the patriarchal society. They importune all women to forge against the domination on nature in such a way it helps their liberation too. They persuade environment activist to join hand with feminist to end the male-hierarchical society. Many academic writings directly state that ecofeminism is a social movement. In his

book *Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice*, Birkeland defines the term as:

...value system, a social movement, and a practice... (which) also offers a political analysis that explores the links between androcentrism and environmental destruction. It is an "awareness" that begins with the realization that the exploitation of nature is intimately linked to Western Man's attitude toward women and tribal cultures.... (18)

Sarah Joesph (born 1946) one of the leading feminists in India, is a novelist, short story writer and feminist activist from Kerala. She has won many awards including Kendra Sahitya Award and Vayalar Award. She is actively participating in feminist movement in Kerala. Being a feminist, she in her works makes awareness about Ecology and the importance of nature. Her novel *Gift in Green* deals both with woman and nature and their sufferings caused by men. The title *Gift in green* denotes the Nature. The plot of the novel deals how Aathi, a village, is polluted by the people and how the nature reacts to it. The central character Kumaran, a greedy man, who has ran away from the village returns to the village only to destroy it in name of modernization. At last, nature which is polluted to the core exhibits its aggressive as flood and purifies itself.

The crux of Ecology claims that nature is meant for all the living creatures. Failing from the above said statement, humans collapse it by acting against the will of nature for his selfishness. "The objectives of ecocriticism are an understanding of man through literature as man is an inseparable part of the environment and enhance the relationship with nature." (Ravindran 94) Nature, as a mother, gives its best to humans as it does to the others but humans are failed to satisfy with it. Their greed generates ill to nature. Having dominance over nature, humans demand it to obey to their needs. Their attitude towards nature is getting worse than ever. Sarah Joseph, observer of society, reiterates the worst attitude of humans against nature in the novel *Gift in Green*. She expresses it as,

It was a little toy gun that emitted small, red spurts of potash. Even so, what a lot of noise it made! At the very first burst, scores of waterfowl scrambled up in panic, taking to their wings. What a sight it made! Dinakaran snatched the gun from Siddhu, broke it into pieces and hurled it into water. 'Aren't you ashamed to scare them like this?' he admonished Siddhu. (Joseph 6)

Humans think that the nature never takes avenge against their ill-treatment. They fail to open the eyes of truth that nature observes everything and it will take avenge when they destroy it. Unaware of the goodness of nature which has brought everything to humans but they always show their disloyalty to nature.

Sarah Joseph echoes the importance of water through a folktale in *Gift in Green*. Through the story of Hagar who is abandoned with her firstborn by her husband, the writer engraves the readers' perception of water. From the birth of human, even before that, water remains a soul creation of earth. Still, people always underrate it and take ownership on it which is highly ridiculous.

Hagar could understand the thirst of a people the infinite value of water and the secret of life scripted into it. She said, 'I have no objection. But you must know that water is life itself...I insist on this not in a spirit of power or of ownership, but in name of life. I know the value of water. To me, the value of the first drop of water is the value of my firstborn...Not a drop of water shall be wasted. I won't allow it. (Joseph 6)

Though Hagar finds the water, she allows the nomads to take it they are in thirst as she knows the significance of water. She considers that water has life itself, without which no one survives. She is also quite clear that nature is meant for all. Hence, she avoids taking ownership of water she finds. Vandana Shiva demystifies it as "women in India are an intimate part of nature, both in imagination and practice"(75).

Kunjimathu's father gives priority to a farmer to marry his daughter. He considers that working with earth will furnish all sorts of pleasure. Therefore, he rejects Kumaran to marry his daughter as he is the destroyer of nature.

Kunjimathu's father was also upset about Kumaran's attitude. Her father would give her only to a *man* – by which he meant, one who took pride in working, earth and soul, with earth and water...I have trained her well to take care of them. Even so, she needs a companion. But it has to be someone whose work improves the land, and not a "magistrate" who would be a fish out of water in this place. (Joseph 20)

Ecofeminism has two major divisions like cultural ecofeminism and radical ecofeminism. The former one suggests that nature and woman are one and the same as they are sharing same activities E.g Procreation-creation. The latter deals with the concept that both woman and nature are destroyed continuously by men and modernization. The radical feminists strongly attack men for their ill-treatment towards nature and women.

The writer compares woman to nature and its elements like water, fire, land etc.

To be a man one must have a body made firm by working hard on the land, tilling and sowing. To know the mind of a woman, he has to know, first, the mind of the land. How could Kunjimathu be entrusted to Kumaran who despised the land and was eager to flee from it? (Joseph 20)

The greed of Kumaran drives him out from the village. He leaves his land and settles himself in a city to earn money and to live a luxurious life. As quoted here Kumaran fails to understand Kunjimathu as he fails to understand the land. Hence the land and woman are one and the same.

Kumaran has left the village for personal upliftment. He returns to his village with the intention of selling the nature of the village and his destroying it for his selfishness. He claims that he wishes to help his village and his villagers to live a comfortable life but he actually throws them into a

pathetic life. When the Kumaran's army enters the village,

The army marched, ploughing the river bed and crushing the empire of oysters. As the baby oysters, began to rise and float on the water, the women began to beat their breasts and wail. 'What are you doing, you buffaloes? It is our food you're ruining.' While collecting oysters, they used to pick out the little ones gingerly and let them out of their nets. (Joseph 40)

As quoted, the village people have gentle treatment of nature whereas the Kumaran's people take the ownership and ill-treat the nature.

Shailaja has got emotional connect with the ruining of nature. When she finds the medical wastes polluting the water, she feels restless.

Laden with the stench, the wind was heavy. Besides placentas and murdered fetuses, Shailaja saw, emerging from innumerable cracks and crevices, severed limbs, swabs oozing with pus, blood clots, decomposed phlegm, chemical agents, plastic bottles and bags, garbage. A terrible thirst afflicted Shailaja. Her throat was dry, her lips parched. She sweated profusely. (Joseph 75)

She becomes hopeless after finding the polluted water. "Her belief that the resources for human survival rested in water, for generation to come, was shattered to smithereens." (Joseph 75) The nature always paid good things to the people though the people keep on polluting it without knowing the result of it. She remembers the words of Markose, "Behold the earth. Everyone chokes her with dirt and garbage. And she? Gives flowers, fruits, nuts, rice and wheat in return" (Joseph 76). Chakkam Kandam is a village which is the best example for a polluted village. The careless mistakes of people, the way they treat nature become very important. Failing in it, people will suffer.

Prakashan loves Shailaja but he is uneducated. Once fishing is his livelihood. His greed makes him to join with Kumaran. He joins hand with him and leaves the village. Though he earns much

Velayudhan, Shailaja's father rejects him to marry his daughter. Shailaja is married to Chandramohan of Chakkam Kandam which has everything as Aadhi. It has backwaters, manfroves, fish etc. He knows the people of Chakkam Kandam well. After the wedding, Shailaja has shocked with the village of Chakkam Kandam as it is polluted much especially its water.

'None of us ever eats or drinks anything here,' the women said, their faces creasing with aversion. Shailaja was horrified. The wells, the ponds, the channels, the streams and backwaters, which spread like an ocean in front of the house, were all covered with layer upon layer of shit. (Joesph 80)

Kumaran's arrival into the village makes changes that spoil nature. "Ever since this thing began, baskets full of empty liquor bottles, plastic bags and rotting food had been accumulating in the mangrove forest" (Joesph 86). Kumaran decides to renovate the Tampuran temple which is against the belief of village people. The village women take the problem in their hand at last. They start to assemble in the Tampuran temple and stop Kumaran to demolish it. "The cultural assault affects the native psychologically" (Ravindran 53) Kumaran decides to destroy their culture too which makes them weak psychologically. Aadhi is an ideal village which gives equal right to women. Actually, women are the one who have built the temple. Thus women are always the symbol of creation like nature.

Tradition has it was the women of Aadhi who built Tampuran's shrine. They kneaded clay with their feet, turned it into balls, then baked and built the walls with them. They plastered the walls with a paste of finely ground soil and paddy husk and polished it further by trowelling it with stones. The walls were earth-coloured. By the time the roof was ready to be thatched, the men joined them. The women matted the palm fronds and gathered plantain strips to tie them with. Every year, thatch the roof anew. No one could tell how old the shrine was. 'Aathiyil, or in the beginning' – that was how everyone referred to the genesis of the shrine. Since

the beginning until now, the women had been guarding and maintain it. (Joseph 118)

Kumaran with his cunningness has reestablished the temple. He misuses nature and the village for his business. The writer denotes the 'age-old silence' which is peace is violated. This is how the civilization, modernization, urbanization and globalization spoil the beauty and peace of the village and its people.

The moment Kumaran got down from the ceremonial boat he was hailed with a deafening burst of crackers that shook the place. Birds in a state of serene meditation in the trees, bushes and paddy fields shot up to the sky, terrified. The sky grew dark. The age-old silence of Aadhi is violated. The air became tense with the shrieking of birds and the flailing of wings. It stirred the water. (Joseph 127)

Sarah Joesph has given key factors by which the Aadhi and other villages are brought down to the destruction.

From Volga to Ganga describes how the ancient people live and their life style etc. The author says that from the beginning of the human race it is woman who leads the people not man. Woman has more strength than man in both physically and psychologically. Man is destructive towards nature and woman. Both woman and nature have their own will. Sarah Joseph compares woman with water.

Their lives had been lived as if they were one with the water. There was a playfulness to the way in which the water filled their paddy fields. Water! Ever flowing like a wordless warning: "I am free; let me be." She would not brook being. Flowing ceaselessly in earth, in trees in animals, in human beings, coming down as rain, flowing along as a river, rising and roaring as the sea... (Joesph 157)

Thus, Cultural Ecofeminism celebrates the association of woman with nature whereas Radical ecofeminism rebukes patriarchal society which suppresses both woman and nature. With the help

of history radical ecofeminism, it is showed that how the male-dominated society degrades the nature and woman so far. Cultural ecofeminism advocates for the importance of preserving nature and woman who are the symbol of life. Moreover, it is essential to have a holistic outlook towards nature to fill up the gap between human and non human entities.

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