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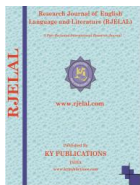
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A STUDY OF ECOFEMINISM AND THE CONFLICT BETWEEN CIVILIZATION AND NATURE/ MEN AND WOMAN IN RAMAYANA WITH REFERENCE TO CHITRA LEKHA BANERJEE'S NOVEL *THE FOREST OF ENCHANTMENTS*

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Abstract

The degradation and exploitation of the natural world and the oppression or subordination of women is viewed in ecofeminism in parallel grounds. Many people today consider Gaia, the Greek Goddess as the archetypal embodiment of the Earth. The Christian tradition of a single male God is destructive for the environment as any kind of worship of the earth is considered as paganism. The Hindu philosophy of "Prakriti" [matter, femaleness] dates back to 3000 years. According to this philosophy, it is the interaction of both "Prakriti" and "Purusha" [consciousness, male] that forms the basis of existence. The Earth is often considered as a mother goddess. A mother goddess is a personification of nature, motherhood, fertility, creation, destruction etc. Sita, the wife of Rama in the great Indian epic *Ramayana* is also considered as a mother goddess as she was born from earth. The motive of this paper is to examine the parallel drawn between the representation of Sita and nature in *Ramayana*, the extent to which both were exploited and the conflict between nature and civilization in *Ramayana* as depicted in *The Forest of Enchantments* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. The story is based on the *Ramayana*, ascribed to Valmiki, which is an integral part of Indian literature and it consists of 24,000 verses in seven books and 500 cantos. The *Ramayana* is about the king of the Raghu dynasty, Rama, whose wife Sita is abducted by the Asura king, Ravana. Sita, meaning furrow, is always depicted as the ideal wife whose sacrifices still echo in folklore and literature. It is traditional patriarchy that stereotypes women into faithful wives and mothers. This system rewards all those women who live out their lives passively according to the set norms. They are glorified in folklore, religion and literature, so that even women contribute and perpetuate the patriarchal order. Sita, whose sacrifices made her a model for an ideal wife, daughter and mother is glorified in folklore, literature and religion as well. However, my paper attempts to portray the ecofeminist Sita through her life in the Panchabati forest, the Dandaka forest, the Asoka forest and finally in Valmiki's Ashram and how these forests played an important part in her life in the book *The Forest of Enchantments*. The strong patriarchy prevalent in *Ramayana* not only exploited the female characters but nature as well. This paper attempts to study the exploitation as depicted in the book, *The Forest of Enchantment* by Chita Bannerjee Divakaruni due to the patriarchal structure. The paper also examines the conflict that arises between nature and culture and between the native and civilization through the war between Ram, the embodiment of civilization and Ravan, the embodiment of the savagery of nature in *Ramayana* as depicted in this novel.

Key words: ecofeminism, patriarchy, gender, nature, nurture, misogyny, culture, civilization

INTRODUCTION

In the modern era, one of the most recurrent themes among literary persons is feminism. Feminism in the literary sense would refer to that philosophy of life that seeks to change the subtle and deep seated causes of women's subjugation or oppression. This can be seen in the works of Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni, an Indian-American author, poet and the Professor of Writing at the University of Houston. Her short story collection, *Arranged Marriage* which won an American Book Award in 1995, her novels, *The Mistress of Spices*, *Sister of My Heart*, *Oleander Girl*, *Palace of Illusions* are all works that have the protagonist as a strong woman who has her own way of life. The characteristic traits of all her novels are the number and shades of women characters which she creates. The central character of her novel is surrounded by women of different kinds and she manages to make all of them stand tall.

The Forest of Enchantments depicts the tale of Sita, through her own voice. She narrates her joys, sorrow, resilience and her understanding of what love is. Moreover, the story narrates Sita's journey from earth and back to it and her love and understanding about nature. It shows how Sita healed nature and nature healed her as well. The novel also depicts how the misogyny of the great warriors like Ram caused the exploitation of both nature and women. The book views the connection between the exploitation and control of women and nature and the struggle between civilization and nature, man and woman.

ECOFEMINISM

Ecofeminism is a branch of feminism that sees environmentalism and the relationship between women and the earth, as foundational to its analysis and practice. Ecofeminist thinkers draw on the concept of gender to analyse the relationships between human and the natural world (Mac Gregor, Sherilyn). The term was coined by the French writer, Françoise d'Eaubonne. According to this theory, women must not be placed in the dominant position of power, but rather an egalitarian society should be formed which is free of domination. There are several branches of

ecofeminism which have different approaches like liberal ecofeminism, spiritual/cultural ecofeminism, social or materialistic ecofeminism.

The parallel that is drawn between the oppression of nature and oppression of women also include how men are seen as the curators of culture and women as the curators of nature and domination of women by men and domination of nature by humans. The main emphasis of ecofeminism is that women and nature must be respected.

GENDERING NATURE

According to the theory of ecofeminism, capitalism is the main cause behind the oppression of women as well as nature. It has led to the harmful split between nature and culture [Osaka Johana, 2018.] The early ecofeminist of the 1970s suggested that the feminine instinct for nurture and their knowledge of nature's processes can be the cure for this split.

Patriarchal society tends to relate women to nature because of their instincts as nurturer and caregiver that they share in common. However ecofeminist scholars have stated that it is not because of their instincts that women relate to nature but because of the fact that they are oppressed and exploited by the same male-dominated forces for their profit. The marginalization is seen in the attribution of nature as "Mother Earth" or "Mother Nature".

According to Shiva, an Indian ecofeminist, women in subsistence economies who produce "wealth in partnership with nature, have been experts in their own right of holistic and ecological knowledge of nature's processes." She states that "these alternative modes of knowing, which is oriented to the social benefits and sustenance needs are not recognized by the capitalist reductionist paradigm, because it fails to perceive the interconnectedness of nature, or the connection of women's lives, work and knowledge with the creation of wealth." [Shiva, Vandana, 1988].

ECOFEMINISM IN WEST AND IN INDIA

The ecofeminism that is prevalent in the West varies from the ecofeminism that prevails in our country. We will now try to analyze the extent to which it varies.

The Western ecofeminist consider that the exploitation of women and nature is due to the capitalist economy that thrives on profit-based systems. It leads to increased nuclear threat and the dumping of toxic-waste, namely chemicals and lethal material [Griffin,1980; Ruther,1978]. The people of the Western countries have actively protested against such activities like the South-West Germany peasant women Why! Movement against nuclear power plant.

However, in India seventy percent of the population is dependent on agriculture practiced in traditional systems for survival. The Western Science and technology development has destroyed our traditional customs and traditions. Also the modern techniques used in agriculture have removed women from the sphere of agriculture because the indigenous skills and knowledge cannot stand in front of scientific skills and knowledge, therefore marginalizing the marginalized section more.

The major ecological problems of India which are caused due to the construction of dams, felling of trees and mining are strongly opposed by the people of the country through world-wide protests like Chipko movement, led by the peasants of the Garhwal Himalayan region by hugging the trees to prevent their commercial felling, the Narmada Bachao Andolan to protest against the construction of large dams on the Narmada river.

Therefore, we can see that the Indian ecological concerns are related to the attempts to preserve forests, land, water and fisheries, which are integral parts of their lives. The economy depends hugely on them and therefore it is very important to sustain and preserve them.

PATRIARCHY IN RAMAYANA AS DEPICTED IN THE FOREST OF ENCHANTMENTS

Gender is one of the central issues in Ramayana. Sita, who is the wife of Rama, the

seventh incarnation of God Krishna, is a Goddess herself, the incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi. However Sita is worshipped for her adherence to her role as a wife and as a mother and the sacrifices she made to attain this position. She is considered as an icon of womanhood, an ideal for other women to follow. However Chitra Banerjee depicts Sita's passion for self-liberation when she finally returns back to the earth from which she was born. Although Sita was a Goddess herself, she was asked to go through a fire test twice to prove her innocence because Rama, the just ruler cared about the people of his kingdom.

Sita replies-

"You who care so much about the citizens of Ayodha, did you think of the impact your actions would have on the women of the city? That men would punish their wives harshly or even discard them for the smallest refractions saying King Rama did so, then why shouldn't I?" (356)

At last before calling on mother Earth to absorb her in, Sita declares-

"Because this is one of those times when a woman must stand up and say, NO MORE!"(357)

Although a Goddess herself she had to live her life according to the norms set to her by the patriarchal society, the greatest example is the Lakshman Rekha that was drawn by her brother-in-law Lakshman within which she had to stay. Crossing the line suggested crossing the limit that she was given by the patriarchal society which led to her being abducted by the demon king Ravana.

Chitra Banerjee creates a host of other female characters who had to suffer because of the misogynist male characters of Ramayana. King Dasarath who could not bear a child married thrice although he knew that the problem was with him. But he made the three women suffer. He could not give the three of them the love or affection that they craved for, always favoring his second wife, Kaikeyi over the two other. Specially, Rama's mother Kaushalya suffered the most because she was the oldest of the three and therefore could not win his

affection. Lakshman did not even consider his wife, Urmila's suggestion to go with them to the forest and left her alone for fourteen years which made her a living dead body.

Another victim of this misogyny was Ahalya, the wife of sage Gautam. Indra who wanted to win her affection tried hard to please her but he failed. So one day, he disguised himself as sage Gautam and in his absence he entered his ashram and took Ahalya to bed. When sage Gautam came to know about it, he cursed Indra. However he also cursed Ahalya and she turned into a stone for no fault of hers. It was Rama's touch that transformed her to her original self. However later when Sita met her she realized that Ahalya didn't utter a word.

"She has taken a vow of silence," sage Gautam explained with some pride. "It is a severe vow and will bring her much spiritual merit" (131)

".....she was looking directly at me, and if I read her glance right, it indicated that her husband didn't know the truth. That he didn't understand her at all." (131)

However the two great victims of the patriarchal structure in *Ramayana* were Suparnakha and Sita. The humiliation and subsequent mutilation of Suparnakha, the sister of the Asura king, Ravana is described in detail in this book. Suparnakha only approached Rama because she was looking for a mate. She preferred roaming in the forest for she belonged to the Asura kingdom and liked to speak her mind. However she was taunted by both Rama and Lakshman and Lakshman then chopped off the girl's nose and ears with his bow. Sita describes Suparnakha's disbelief at the actions of Ram and Lakshman as:

"She looked at my husband, her eyes full of disbelief that someone could do such a thing to her when all she'd offered him was love." (149)

Rama, the seventh incarnation of Lord Krishna is also portrayed as a misogynist character who is so blinded by his duty towards the citizens of his kingdom that he abandons his pregnant wife in the forest without even giving her a chance to explain

herself. When the rumours of Sita's infidelity was doing rounds Ram decided to banish her even when she was heavily pregnant instead of standing by her and proving her innocence.

".....And how about our wives? They're going to start expecting the same kind of submissive behavior from us. They'll be doing whatever they want, going wherever they want." [314]

Therefore, the misogynist undertone of Valmiki's *Ramayana* finds full expression in *The Forest of Enchantment*. It shows how women characters had to suffer because of the patriarchal structure. However, the victims of the patriarchy were not only women but also the natural world- the forest and the tribes that dwelled in it. It was Rama's self-exile that led him into the Dandaka and Panchabati forest. However we see that Ram and Lakshman are constantly in conversation with the Rishis to kill the asuras- the tribal people of the forest. The forest is their home and it is their right to attack the Rishis who have intervened in their living space. However, from the very beginning, it is the asuras that are killed and the sages that are victimised. Therefore, we see how nature and women were exploited by men in *Ramayana* as depicted by Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni.

ECOFEMINISM AND THE CONFLICT BETWEEN NATURE AND CULTURE IN RAMAYANA WITH REFERENCE TO THE FOREST OF ENCHANTMENTS:

Ramayana, which narrates the tale of Rama's [the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu] journey and his wife Sita's abduction by the Asura king Ravana, which consists of 24,000 verses in seven books and 500 cantos. Famous retelling of the *Ramayana* include the *Ramayan* of Kamban in Tamil [11th-12th century], the *Saptakanda Ramayana* of Madhava Kandalin in Assamese[14th century], *Krittivasi Ramayana* by Krittibas Ojha in Bengali[15th century], *Bhavarth Ramayana* by Sant Eknath in Marathi[16th century], etc. These retellings follow the main plotline of Valmiki's story, only depicting Rama's story. However *The Forest of Enchantments* retells the story of *Ramayana* from Sita's perspective expressing her joy, grief, *sacrifices*, her opinions on love and finally her self-liberation which is not

depicted in other versions of Ramayana. Sita is glorified in literature as an ideal woman who is an obedient wife and a good mother. However Chitra Banerjee portrays Sita as a feminist, more so an ecofeminist who understands how women and nature are dominated for the profit of men.

The concept of *Prakriti* [nature, femaleness] and *Purusha* [consciousness, maleness] dates back to the Vedic period. Women are compared to nature because of the life-giving and nurturing aspects that both embody. Sita, meaning "furrow" is the symbolic representation of nature in *The Forest of Enchantment*. She is said to be born from Earth when her father, king Janaka found her while ploughing the ground. Her childhood is depicted as:

"My strange gift with plants was a mystery to me. Perhaps it was because, like them, I was earth-born. Maybe for the same reason, when I touched a plant, I knew its healing properties..." (7)

Because she could cure many people with her knowledge about the medicinal properties of her herbs, she was often called a "Goddess" by the people of her kingdom. From a very early time she was fascinated by the forest and the people that lived there. She wanted to visit the forest but "It wasn't something that women did"(8)

From her childhood itself, Sita was an expert in her martial arts lessons because her mother, queen Sunaina felt that they needed to learn. She used those moves on Kaikeyi as well, an equally skilled martial artist and defeated her, which impressed Kaikeyi as well as sew the seeds for future vengeance. She wasn't interested particularly in wanting to play with dolls and dress up in jewelry like her younger sister, Urmila. She did not like to pluck flowers as she thought it was a kind of murder and so she carefully picked only the blooms for the offerings that the priest asked her to.

After Sita's marriage to Rama, when she was travelling to Ayodha in her palanquin, she was distressed to see the callous behavior of the soldiers towards the trees.

"... this is their home, and we are visitors," I added. "we should treat them with courtesy and not cause them needless pain."

Rama's brows drew together in surprise. Clearly, he'd never considered that plants feel pain as we do. But he inclined his head, "You are tender-hearted my dear. I can't fault that. It's right and necessary that women should be so".

I wanted to ask him, wasn't it as important for a king to feel hurt of others as women did? Wasn't he responsible for the animals and birds and trees in his realm, as well as the people? Who would protect them if he didn't? (56)

Sita enjoyed her journey through the forest. She wanted to feel every object of the forest- the bird nests and fox-lairs, the rare and healing herbs. She wanted to run barefoot through the grass and smell the sap.

"But such things were not allowed to princesses, especially those married into the royal family of Ayodha" (57)

Even in Ayodha Sita filled up her balcony with plants and trees that gave her the feeling of being in a forest when she heard the sound of the leaves rustling in the forest.

In the Valmiki's Ramayana, the "Aranya Kanda" begins when Rama, Sita and Lakshman after being exiled, enters the wilderness of Dandaka and sees the beautiful landscape covered with darbha, a grass that is considered most sacred in vedic literature. The conflict between culture and civilization is very clearly depicted in the "Aranya Kanda. The Dandakaranya spreads across several states, with an area over 92,000 sq.km. Sita, who rarely had a part to play in Valmiki's Ramayana, could anticipate this turmoil and had advised Rama that the violation of the jungle would lead to destruction. This chapter of *Ramayana*, is rarely heard or retold. However this is the one chapter that India needs to revisit the most today, considering the conflict between civilization and nature. Sita warns him against the use of force against nature which would disturb the balance of existence for she feels that even Rakshasas have a right to live a dignified life. However Kshatriya dharma prevented

Rama from paying heed to Sita's advice as the state is always driven by sheer greed to capture the forest and exploit it for material profits.

In ancient Sanskrit texts, Dandakarnya is depicted with a layered personality and a wilderness that provided shelter to exiled kings and revered sages. Many marvelous beings like Yakshas, Gandharbas, tribal communities and Rakshasas lived there. It was also a place for wisdom to princes who were educated in Gurukuls.

The trio's journey through the forest is depicted by Bannerjee in a similar light. The forest is seen as a space to be brought under domination. They invaded the space of the natives living there for ages and tried to dominate them. A sage's description of Rakshasas to Sita demonstrates the point.

"Each tribe is unique. Tarakha belonged to a militant group that believed the forest was theirs--the last space left to them, since humans have taken over most of the cities—and thus they wanted to drive us out., through death if necessary". (128)

In another part of the tale we find sage Gautam discussing with Rama and Lakshman the real reason behind their entry to the forest,

".....perhaps that's why destiny brought you to the forest; Gautam was saying. To get rid of them for good. To wipe out their unholy ways. To spread the light of civilization. You must promise me you'll try your best to do that."(135)

However, the Rakshasas were the natives who had full right to the forest. It was humans who were entering into their private space and ruining their habitats, their kith and kin. The need of the patriarchal society to control the forest for their material needs—to occupy more place for the habitats of the sages, for cultivation, for hunting etc. were forever prevalent in the history of human civilization.

In contemporary times, the Dandakaranya survives as a geographical entity which is full of minerals and the forest is now occupied by a section

of "savages"—the Adivasis who suffer because of the ongoing war between the state and the Maoists.

When Ram, Lakshman and Sita entered Panchabati forest, Sita describes it as the

"....true heart of the forest, mysterious and unspoiled and beautiful home to beings unlike any we had seen before". (127)

Sita was in peace with nature because she herself is a symbolic representation of nature. Therefore nature too showed her "her kind and bounteous face".(137)

It was Ram and especially Lakshman who represented civilization that failed to see nature's bounteous face. Lakshman did not approve of Sita's friendship with nature as he felt that the forest creatures were dangerous and tricky. But it did not make Sita change her ways. She was one with nature in the Panchabati forest. It was first among the beautiful mother nature that Sita too felt the lack of being a mother. She too wanted to become a mother and expressed her desire but Ram had already decided to place his righteousness and duty before anything and did not agree with her. Sita's grief is expressed thus when Ram did not understand her desire to be a mother

"....you don't understand!" I cried. How could he? He wasn't a woman. Time didn't press on him as heavily. His body wasn't made to harbor another life..." (141)

However the greatest conflict between nature and civilization, between Prakriti and Purusha and between man and woman which sows the seed for the great war that is narrated in the epic is the mutilation and the exploitation of Suparnakha in the hands of Lakshman and Ram. Suparnakha, a Rakshashi and the sister of the Asura king, Ravan is symbolic of the wilderness of nature. She first appears in Chapter 17 of Valmiki's *Ramayana*. Suparnakha who represents nature's coarseness is attracted by the muscular and well built Ram and approaches him in a lustful way. She cannot understand Ram's vow of taking one wife as she is not a part of the civilization to which they belong. She was looking for a mate and the Asuras sure did not have any rule of conduct to be followed unlike

the social rule of conduct that bound Ram, Lakshman and Sita. So she didn't understand when the brothers were having fun at her cost. Infact, Valmiki portrays the entire incident as a comic relief in the otherwise serious epic.

Banerjee's Suparnakha also represents the wilderness of nature who is not afraid of speaking out her mind. Civilization has set standard norms for women to follow. So when Suparnakha approaches Ram to be her mate her act is described by Sita as unmaidenly. However she soon realizes that a Rakhshashi is not bound by the same set of standards and hence she was acting out of her impulse for a mate. She is quoted as

".....I'm not much for palaces, but even I can see how fine it is. Me, I prefer roaming in the forest. Living the natural life. Plus I like to speak my mind- and that can get you trouble in court. Wouldn't you agree?"(146)

Ram could have rejected her kindly and explain her the situation but he made fun of her situation and carried the joke further with his brother Lakshman.. They made fun of her ignorance of the ways of the world and ridiculed her coarseness. Sita could understand that she was being taunted and wanted her to go-

"Admittedly, the girl had gone beyond the norms of maidenly behavior, offering herself to a man she barely knew, but perhaps the rules of conduct were different for the asuras..... I gestured to her from behind Ram's back to leave with dignity before things went any further." (148)

However when she sprang upon Sita with rage to harm her Lakshman chopped off her ears and nose as Ram commanded.

"She looked at my husband, her eyes full of disbelief that someone could do such a thing to her when all she'd offered him was love." (149)

When Sita expressed her sadness over their harsh actions Ram and Lakshman justified their actions by saying that Rakshashas were a threat to humans and therefore it was their duty to kill them whenever they saw one. Ram further justified Lakshman's actions :

"...'Infact', he continued, 'Lakshman was being kind to this one, sparing her life because she was a female.'" (151)

However Sita understood that it was a harsher punishment for Suparnakha to get her face disfigured at a time when she was searching for a mate so desperately.

When Ram said that they were doing a service to human by bringing peace to the forests and making them safer for the Rishis, Sita states thus

"I didn't argue further. I could see that the men wouldn't change their minds. Their belief in their superiority of their own ways was too deeply ingrained in them. But I wasn't satisfied. We were visitors to the forest which already had its own rules, its own rhythm, its own savage beauty . It belonged more to the Rakhshasas than to us. What right did we have to cause destruction to those who had been here long before we came?. (151-152)

The strong desire of Ram and Lakshman to tame the wilderness of nature and to spread civilization is opposed by Sita's knowledge about nature and her attempts to save the forest from exploitation echoes almost throughout the book and even in Valmiki's "Aranya Khanda." Sita is not given much to say in Valmiki's epic. However her opinion is first voiced when she advises her husband and brother in law not to destroy nature as the repercussions can be dangerous.

Later when Sita is abducted by Ravana through trickery the conflict between culture and nature can be seen in the Lakshman Rekha that Lakshman draws for Sita asking her to stay within it and hence within culture. The line represents the norms that has been set for women by the patriarchal society. It can be said to be the line of Dharma that keeps out those aspects of nature that is not acceptable in a society- the natural instincts and urges that doesn't discriminate between man, woman or animal. Inside the line lie the social aspects of civilization and outside lies the coarse and wild nature that is represented by infidelity, animal instincts and no sense of duty or morality. Inside the

line Sita was a faithful wife and hence Ravan, the ten headed Asura God who was a learned man didn't enter the line of civilization. He was the representation of the wild and savage nature. Therefore he forced Sita to cross the line. Once she did so she was no longer bound by the social and cultural constructs and became one with the wilderness of nature. So Ravan abducted her and carried her off to his kingdom.

As a captive in Lanka she realized that not all Asuras represented savageness as was told by the Rishis They were different and existed peacefully in the kingdom of Lanka ruled by their beloved king Ravana. Bannerjee takes liberty in creating the Asura king as though he was representative of the savaged part of nature, yet his subjects were happy under his rule and he was a just and ruler. As a captive in the Asoka garden we find nature being sympathetic to Sita in her time of grief. Nature comforted her as a mother comforts her child when she wept burying her face on the earth. The plants and animals shared her grief and sympathized with her in her sorrow.

"...When I touched them I could feel their sympathy for me. If they were willing my touch cured them. And thus we grew to love each other. I was particularly fond of the Asoka tree under which I slept..." (187)

After returning to Ayodha Sita missed the wild unpredictable forest which was her home for so many years. But it was not so in case of Ram as he felt that he was a part of civilization and his duty was to serve the people of his country. When Sita expressed her nostalgia for the forest Ram said:

"... 'That time in our life is over dear,' he said, 'We are now king and queen. We belong to the people. They count on us to be here for them, in good times and bad.'..." (304)

It was on this pretext that Ram isolated the pregnant Sita in the ashrams of Valmiki in the wilderness saying that she must visit the forest as she missed it so much, when he heard that the people of Ayodha questioned the purity of Sita.

In this part of her life too nature did the best to care and nurture Sita and Sita too played her part by teaching her sons, Lav and Kush the

importance of nature and how to co-exist peacefully without conflict with nature. They grew up to love and respect nature in all its forms, something their civilized palace would have failed to teach them.

Sita's Ramayana by Samhita Arni begins with a heavily pregnant Sita who walks in to the forest with bruises and tears. The inhabitants of the forest ask her who he is. Sita thus begins:

I AM SITA , THE DAUGHTER OF THE EARTH,
SPRUNG FROM THE SAME WOMB THAT
NURTURES THIS FOREST. I AM THE PRINCESS
OF MITHILA AND THE LAST QUEEN OF
AYODHA. (8)

LET ME LIVE HERE. Sita begged.

THE WORLD OF MAN HAS BANISHED ME.(9)

Thus we see that Sita was living the last phase of her life in harmony with nature. It was Ram who again invaded her personal space by wounding her sons through his Ashvamedha Yagna . This time however the forces of civilization could not exploit the natural world that Sita represented. When Ram asked her to perform an agni test once again in the court for the satisfaction of the people of his kingdom, she refused to live her life passively according to the set conduct of the court and so she called upon mother earth to assimilate her within herself.

"Because this is one of the times when a woman must stand up and say, No more!" (357)

Therefore the earth sprung open and Sita was assimilated with the Earth from where she came, who she was and what she represented. Therefore nature emerged victorious in this conflict against civilization.

RAVANA- THE CONFLICT BETWEEN NATURE AND CULTURE/ THE NATIVE AND THE CIVILISATION:

According to Madan Lal Goel , Ramayana is not a war between the good and the evil but between different ethnic groups- the Aryans and the Dravidians. It represents the invasion of the Aryans to India to displace the native Dravidians who were represented as giants or ethnic groups of monkeys. The Aryans represented the white skinned people whose victory displaced the Dravidians. The invasion

of Lanka by Rama and the subsequent defeat of Ravana thus can be described as the struggle between the native and the outsider and the interplay between power relations where Ram is depicted as an incarnation of God and Ravana is described as a giant and hence ascribed lower status.

However Banerjee doesn't give an inferior status to Ravana depicting him as an incarnation of a god himself. In this form too he had managed to win the celestial throne from the gods but he couldn't stay there for long for he missed being in earth.

"But I got bored. I missed our beautiful, imperfect earth- the trees and the clouds and the birds singing, the winds and the ocean, even the blazing sun. I came to Lanka and took it from Kubera."(198)

Thus the war between Rama and Ravana was the war between civilization as represented by Rama and the savageness of nature or the native as represented by Ravana who was a just ruler and wanted to avenge his sister Suparnakha. Thus by killing Ravana Ram destroyed the majestic wilderness of Lanka and civilized it by appointing Dushashan, the brother of Ravana, who was a follower of Rama, as the king .

CONCLUSION

An active campaigner for women's spirituality and a writer Rosemary Radford Ruether in her book *Gaia and God: an Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* offers a feministic view of reflecting and thinking about the earth. She explains that there are three major characters: God, Gaia and humans and they are interrelated. The character of Gaia is depicted as a theologian who is the Greek Goddess of Earth. According to her the Christian tradition of a monotheistic male God is a destructive process that destroys nature. She states that merely replacing the male God by a female God would not be the solution to this problem. It calls for a healing relation to each other. The healing can be found deeply rooted in the ecology of the earth as against the domination inflicted on nature by man or upon woman by man. She also calls for a new symbolic

structure to symbolize the interrelations of men and women, humans and earth, humans and the divine, the divine and the earth.

In her book *New Woman / New Earth* she states:

"Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationship continue to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socio-economic relations and the underlying values of this (modern industrial) society.(204)

In a country like India where nature and female Goddesses are worshipped and where forest is an important source of livelihood, it is very important to protect nature. It should be the moral duty of every individual to have a healing attitude towards one another and not of domination or exploitation.

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